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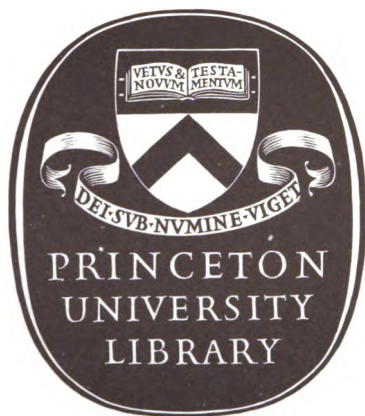


OVER THE GERMAN LINES

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OVER THE GERMAN -LINES- By "WINGS"





The Aeronautical Collection of
Arthur L. Newman
Class of 1923

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OVER THE GERMAN LINES

OVER THE GERMAN LINES

AND OTHER SKETCHES ILLUSTRATING
THE LIFE AND WORK OF AN ARTILLERY
SQUADRON OF THE R.A.F. IN FRANCE

BY
"WINGS"
(CAPTAIN, R.A.F.)

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY "APTERYX"

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO
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**TO
MY MOTHER**

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Introduction

BY ANOTHER HAND

“OF the making of many books” (about flying) “there is no end !” No publisher’s list is complete in these days if it does not contain an announcement of at least one volume dealing with the work of the airmen in the Great War, and editors of popular magazines are eager to accept articles and sketches illustrative of the part played by the Royal Air Force against the Germans and their allies. Nor is this to be wondered at. This generation has not yet got over its feelings of amazement at the mere fact of flight, as is proved by the upturned glances and the remarks of those

on the ground below every time an aeroplane is heard overhead. In a war more horrible than all previous wars put together, though individual heroism daily adds lustre to the records of every branch of His Majesty's Forces, yet it is in the work of the youngsters who man our "airy navies grappling in the central blue" that what romance is left to war is chiefly to be found.

But the great British Public has still, it is to be feared, very vague notions as to the varied rôles played by aircraft at the front. How frequently has a pilot belonging to an "artillery squadron"¹ been asked when home on a well-earned "leave," "How many Huns have you brought down?" and how often has he noted

¹ *I.e.* a squadron the *principal* duty of which is the direction of artillery fire by "wireless" from the air.

the puzzled look and scarcely concealed disappointment at his reply that it is "not his business to bring down Huns" at all? How many conversations such as the following still take place?

Member of the Public: "What is the highest you have flown?"

Flying Officer: "Oh, about 10,000, I suppose."

Member of the Public: "Really! Why, young Jones was telling me the other day that he does his jobs at about 20,000."

And it is clear from the speaker's tone that young Jones is at least twice as much a hero as the man to whom he is talking, as if heroism in the air was a matter to be measured by the reading of the aneroid! Whereas, paradoxical as it may seem to the average groundling, generally speaking, the higher you are in

the air (within the limits of the power of the human machine to stand the physical effects of great altitudes) the safer you are.

Although the rôle of the aeroplane in war is daily extending, so that the Air Force tends more and more to become, in a phrase which has become historic, "the cavalry of the clouds," it still remains true that the primary rôle of aircraft in war is to be the *eyes* of the Army. A hundred years ago, and less, the general who discovered what his enemy was doing on the other side of the hill scored heavily. To-day he wants to know what he is doing twenty, thirty, forty miles away, and, incidentally, to hinder him in the doing of it, if he can.

Up to 1914 his ability to know the intentions and plans of his opponent was

strictly limited. The skill of his cavalry scouts and the craft of his spies provided him with his principal means of information, though the captive balloon had slightly increased his range of vision. His power of preventing those plans from maturing was confined to the extreme effective range of his artillery; and when we say effective range, we do not mean merely the distance to which his projectiles could be hurled, but that to which they could be directed with some degree of accuracy from Forward Observation Posts on the ground!

Flight has changed all that. To-day enemy concentrations many miles behind his lines are observed and reported on at once from aircraft, his far-distant gun positions are revealed, and the fire of the opposing artillery directed, round by

round, from aeroplanes carrying a wireless equipment; and, important as are such things as bomb-dropping expeditions, low flying for the purpose of attacking troops on the ground by machine-gun fire as well as by bombs, it remains the fact that the most valuable work done by airmen in war is observation and report of the enemy's activity.

Four years of war have done more than twenty years of peace would have accomplished for the development of the airman and the craft he flies. "Military aeronautics" was a science in its veriest infancy when Germany threw down the gauntlet to the world in 1914. To-day it has an ever-growing literature of its own, and scarce a week passes without some new discovery being made of its latent capacities.

Very early in the present campaign the "fighting scout" made his appearance on the scene. He is the aristocrat of the air. He it is who, flying a machine with enormous climbing power and almost incredible speed, goes up to keep the wide expanses of the air free for his slower and more stable brother of the artillery squadron to do his "jobs of work." Give him a machine to his liking, and a gun that can shoot, and he asks nothing better than plenty of Huns to "scrap" with; and the great British Public which reads daily of his exploits in the toll of enemy machines destroyed or brought down out of control takes him to its heart as *the* hero, *par excellence*, of this war of wars. And all honour to him too; he well deserves it!

The oft-heard expression, "the command of the air," means that the side

which possesses it has the greater freedom to use aerial reconnaissance. Although it is true that the trend of events during the last eighteen months has been to indicate that the scope of the airman is rapidly extending and that he is becoming more and more an instrument of the offensive—an artillery of the longest range with his bomb dropping, and a kind of super-cavalry with his low-flying against troops on the ground—the day will never dawn when his primary rôle will become a subordinate one and armies be able to dispense with their eyes in the air.

There are two ways of writing a book about flying. The author can recount, so far as the authorities will allow him, his own personal experiences. In short, he can be autobiographical even though anonymous.

This method possesses the attraction of a personal narrative. The reader becomes interested in the individuality of the writer, and, as a child always professes a preference for a "true" story, so he finds a special interest in the narratives of work actually done. But this method suffers from drawbacks. Modesty is a strong point with your fighting man of all the Services, and even anonymity does not enable him to tell of his own doings as another historian would. It is the job and the doing of it which count in the true airman's eyes, and not what he felt like while the business was on hand.

Hence the autobiographical method, save in the hands of a literary genius, suffers from one of two defects. It must either consist of a rather flat and impersonal record of work done, or it must

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create a prejudice against the writer from the intrusion of the personal pronoun. No doubt there are many people who want to know what an airman "feels like." But for all that there is something alien to the traditions of his service in his attempting to tell it.

There is another method, and it is that which is employed in the following pages. It is to tell of fact as if it were fiction.

The writer spent a year or thereabouts in France as a member of an artillery squadron. The origin of the series of sketches which the book contains was an effort to set out in writing for the benefit of his parents, without any thought, originally, of publication, an account of "what we do."

The articles divide themselves into two classes. The first five present the reader

with an account of the various branches of activity engaged in by a squadron of the kind with which the writer worked. They do not pretend to be records of actual days' (or nights') operations, but aim at giving an accurate description, as far as may be, of the methods employed and the experiences of those who undertake the "jobs," and every one who knows will recognise that they are true to life in every particular. Their outstanding merit is that they give a vivid picture of the work which was being done day by day by hundreds of pilots on the Western front in 1916-17 as no autobiography could.

The remaining five are intended to convey an impression of the vivid life of that band of brothers, a happy squadron in its hours of ease as well as when at work. Nothing quite like the life of a squadron

of the R.A.F. has been known before in war. Perhaps the nearest analogy to it would be found in the ward-room of a battle-cruiser at sea. There is the same intimacy, the same care-free hours when off duty, and a similar sense of living very close to the heart of elemental things, seldom if ever spoken of, and thought about as little as possible, but there all the time, binding men together as nothing else could.

The flying men differ from their brethren who man the other kind of squadrons in one particular. They are for the most part very young. True, the work they do, the risks they face, bring manly maturity very quickly. Every parent who has sent a boy to France, proud of the "Wings" not long put up on the tunic, and has had the joy of welcoming him home again on

leave, has noted that in three or four months a man has taken the place of the youngster. Many of the members of an average squadron in France to-day would have been still Sixth Form boys at our Public Schools or "Freshers" at the 'Varsities had there been no war.

It is to be hoped that the series of sketches which form the second part of this book, which like the earlier ones are all founded on actual experiences, and so are true to life, will serve to convey an attractive picture of the daily doings of the airman both on and off duty. Our Future is in the air, as our Past has been on the sea, of that there can be no doubt; and if these pages can help in ever so small a fashion to attract a few of the right kind of man to the service of his country in the youngest of the Forces of the Crown, the

R.A.F., the labour involved in their preparation will have been well spent.

A brief biographical note as to the author may be of interest to some readers. Captain ——, otherwise “Wings,” left one of our great public schools for Sandhurst in June, 1915. In the following April he “passed out,” being gazetted to a certain very famous infantry regiment, but “seconded” for service with the R.F.C. He obtained his pilot’s wings at the end of June, and went to France in July of that year. He was attached to a certain artillery squadron, and served with it until May 1917.

One Sunday morning in that month his flying career came to an abrupt end. Engaged with an observer in “doing a shoot,” their machine was attacked by six or seven Huns, and in the course of the

fight which ensued the pilot was so badly wounded in the right arm that it was found necessary to amputate it above the elbow within half an hour of their return. Notwithstanding this disablement, they fought their enemy off, and "Wings" was able to take his machine home to his aerodrome. He is still a member of the R.A.F., but employed on other than flying duties.

"APTERYX."

PREFACE

OF the articles in this book, the first four appeared originally in the *Daily Mail*, "Night Birds" in the *Sphere*, "Lost Soles" in the *Bystander*, and "Driven Down" in the *Daily News*. They have been revised and in some cases considerably enlarged for publication here.

I am greatly indebted to my friend "R. S. W." who has so skilfully worked out my ideas for the coloured wrapper, and to "Apteryx" (an appropriate pseudonym) for his Introduction and for much assistance in the preparation of the work for press.

"WINGS."

LONDON.

Over the German Lines

Over the German Lines

“CONTACT, sir !”

“Contact !” Click ! The switch is on, the waiting mechanic swings the big four-bladed propeller smartly over, and the engine starts with a noisy metallic clatter.

For a minute or two the clatter increases, until it becomes a deep roar as the pilot tests his engine, then, finding it satisfactory, he throttles down and waves his left hand, the “chocks” are jerked from under the wheels, and the machine moves gently forward.

After glancing round to see that the aerodrome is clear of other machines, the pilot “taxi” slowly across to a far

corner, and turning into the wind opens the throttle full out.

The machine leaps forward, bumping over the uneven surface, until, gaining speed, the tail slowly lifts, and after a run of a couple of hundred yards, the aeroplane skims easily off the ground.

For another fifty yards the pilot holds her down, and then, with a rush and a swoop, up over the sheds and away !

After a circuit of the aerodrome, on reaching a height of 800 ft. or so he connects up the wireless instrument and motions to his observer that all is ready. The latter sends a few signals to test the working, and, finding they are answered correctly, settles down to arrange his maps.

The pilot, one eye on his instruments and the other on familiar landmarks, steers the

machine for the German lines, climbing steadily all the while.

On reaching our battery positions the gunners are called up, and before starting work, pilot and observer cross the lines to get as close a view as possible of the target, and to form an accurate idea of its position. In this case it is a German battery about three miles over which is to receive the attention of our guns, and when it has been examined carefully, they turn towards our own side again.

At once—"Wouff! Wouff! Hs-s-s-s-s"—two swirling patches of black smoke appear about 100 ft. away, a little above and to the right.

The pilot swerves to the right and side-slips a little, and when, a few seconds later, more black puffs appear, they are away 200 ft. to the left and well above,

so that although the bark of the shell is still distinguishable, the hiss of the flying fragments is no longer audible.

“ Archie ” follows them back as far as the front-line trenches and then stops, leaving a trailing line of rapidly diffusing balls of black smoke across the sky.

Now the work begins. After calling up his battery again, the observer sends the signal for “ Fire,” and motioning the pilot to fly in a certain direction so that he has a clear view unobstructed by the planes, he glues his eyes on the four tiny mounds far below, which are all that can be seen of the Hun battery.

For about twenty seconds, an interval that seems an age to the waiting observer, nothing happens. Then a tiny puff of greyish smoke suddenly appears about a hundred yards from the target. He turns

and signals the correction down to the gunners, and again sends "Fire."

This time the shell bursts fifty yards nearer, and the next only about twenty yards away. And so the shoot goes on, the fire of each gun being gradually corrected, until the shells are bursting close round the target. Sometimes a direct hit is obtained, and the German gun pit is momentarily blotted out by a cloud of smoke and earth.

The pilot, seeing that all is going on well, passes over a slip of paper on which is written, "Good shooting. Am going to drop my bombs," and once more heads the machine towards Hunland.

About three miles over he spots a storage dump near a railway siding, and steering straight over it releases his two bombs.

They both crane over the side watching

the smooth, tapering bodies getting smaller and smaller as they hurtle down, and the pilot flies in a wide circle so as to keep them in view.

They are going to miss. No—yes; they have missed. A big mushroom-shaped cloud of smoke appears in a field about 150 yards from the dump, and the pilot is just turning away disgusted, when there is a second bright flash, and a greyish-black cloud suddenly obscures the target.

The smoke of the burst soon blows away, but still some seems to come from the siding with occasional flickers of flame. The second bomb has fallen in the middle of some inflammable goods and a fire started.

The pilot waves his arms with delight, but his joy is short lived.

Wouff! Wouff! Bang! Hss-s-s-s.
Bang!

“Archie” is thoroughly annoyed this time, and his second shot tears a jagged hole about 8 in. square in one plane.

A startling series of sideslips, nosedives, and quick turns follows, and then, having put the “Archie” gunners off for a moment or so, the pilot pushes the nose of his machine down and goes “hell for leather” for the British lines surrounded by writhing patches of black smoke.

Suddenly, when about half-way back, the “Archie” fire stops, and for a moment all is quiet. The observer looks round suspiciously, and then in a flash twists round and, kneeling on his seat, begins to sight his gun.

Tut-tut-tut—tut-tut-tut—tut-tut-tut—the stutter of a machine gun breaks out.

Glancing back over his shoulder, the pilot sees a big, long-bodied machine with narrow swept-back wings, adorned with black crosses, diving straight down for his tail, with the winking flash of a machine gun, very much alive, coming from the passenger seat.

There is a harsh, tearing sound as the bullets rip through the fabric of the planes, and then the enemy machine has gone, diving away underneath, but not before our observer has fired a drum into it at close range.

As the Hun swoops away below, the pilot pushes the nose of his own machine down and opens fire on him with his gun when he appears again in front.

The black-crossed planes lurch sideways, the tail goes up, and down goes the Hun, diving vertically earthwards.

Pilot and observer watch him breathlessly, but after going down a couple of thousand feet he flattens out and, with his exhaust pouring out smoke and sparks, "streaks off" into Hunland before they realise that his dive, seemingly out of control, was only a bluff.

Two more swift black shapes suddenly rush past, and the last they see of the German machine is a dim speck in the distance, hotly pursued by two British "scouts."

"Archie" soon starts again more viciously than ever, and the pilot heads for the lines once more, manœuvring his now rather battered machine more gingerly than before in case extra strain should break some already damaged part.

A good deal of height had been lost

during the fight, and now they are only about 2,500 ft. up.

On reaching the trenches the stutter of a machine gun again starts, but no other aeroplane is in sight. This time the bullets come from the ground, as the German infantry, furious at the repulse of their machine, try their own hand at bringing down the conqueror. But the shooting is bad, and the machine is not hit, and reaches our lines in safety.

The observer having signalled down to the battery that he is going home, motions the pilot to disconnect the instrument, and points towards the small wood in the distance beside which is the aerodrome, and so they return after a successful three hours' work.

The Pictures

The Pictures

“HI! Jimmy. Go and get your flying kit sharp; we’re off to the war again as soon as possible.”

The tall observer, strolling up the path to the mess, turns as he hears the shout, and inquires amiably, “What’s the racket now, old thing? Another shoot?”

“No; photography this time. Richards went up to take our area yesterday; the camera jammed when he had only done half, and I’ve got to finish the job. So hustle up, the machine is all ready, and the C.O. panting for us to start.”

Jimmy turns away, with a regretful glance towards the mess, murmuring,

“Funny how impatient majors usually are! No time for a drink, I suppose?”

“No, not a second.”

“Oh, all right! What a horrible war it is!” And he disappears into his hut in search of leather coat, helmet, and goggles.

Five minutes later, when they are both seated in the machine and waiting to start, his mind seems still to be occupied with thoughts of nourishment in some form as he turns and inquires, “Got any chocolate? You can have some of mine if you haven’t.”

“Thanks muchly. I will! But don’t throw all the silver paper in my face as you usually do. Yesterday so much rubbish came flying past my head at one time that I thought there must be a Hun somewhere shooting chunks off the old machine.”

“You must learn to put up with these little worries,” replied Jimmy airily. “However, if you fly nicely, I’ll think about it.”

The roar of the engine puts a stop to any further conversation, and soon they skim off the ground and start on their job.

.

For about half an hour they sail up and down behind our lines, climbing steadily, both taking a keen interest in any movement on the ground below.

Presently a German machine crosses over to our side at a great height, and is at once surrounded by clouds of smoke from our bursting “Archies.” They look up and watch him, but he finds it too hot for comfort, and, swerving round, goes back again, soon fading away in the dim distance.

After a while Jimmy passes over a note :

“What height are we?” And the pilot, after scribbling an answer on the back and adding, “What about that chocolate?” hands it back.

A moment later another scrap of paper changes hands on which is written, “Have eaten it all.”

The pilot scowls and then smiles sardonically. The machine suddenly begins to roll and wallow in a most disconcerting manner.

Jimmy, never a good sailor, stands it for a few moments, and then, thinking it time this sort of thing stopped, puts up his hands, one of them holding a large bar of nut chocolate, while his lips form a soundless cry of “Kamerad.”

The pilot receives the peace-offering with a grin of satisfaction, and the machine proceeds on an even keel.

Up to now the flight has been more or less of a joy-ride, but, the machine having reached the necessary height for taking the photographs, the work begins in earnest.

The pilot hands over a brief note, "Am going over ; keep your eyes open," heads the machine towards the lines, and then concentrates his attention on his map and the ground below him.

The observer gets up and looks over his machine gun and its mounting to see that all is working smoothly, and then keeps a sharp watch on the sky all round for hostile aircraft. The aeroplane is travelling but slowly against a strong head wind, so that attacking Huns will have the advantage of swooping down on our friends down wind, and how great that advantage is the man on the ground can hardly realise. At the same time the reduced

speed on the outward journey is of great assistance to the pilot in getting his exposures accurate, and when he turns westwards again, having reached the furthest point that he wishes to photograph, his machine is whirled back to our side of the trenches before the enemy gunners can correct their aim.

The pilot scans the country beneath him carefully, and, when directly over some landmark that he has chosen from his map as roughly in the centre of the area he wants to take, he releases the shutter.

A few swift movements and the exposed plate is changed for a fresh one, which is similarly exposed over the next point.

So they gradually work farther over the lines until nearly all the plates are used. The last two have to be taken over a difficult bit of ground which appears to

be nothing more than a few shell-marked fields, and the pilot finds it hard to get any central point to fly over. He finally decides on a point where two tracks meet by a hedge, and is manœuvring to get over it, when the German "Archie" gunners, thinking it time they had something to say on the subject, burst four high-explosive shells one after another all round the machine.

He starts, looks swiftly round, and then banks the machine over, swerving away none too soon from the curling balls of smoke.

Again he works up towards the chosen spot, twisting and turning among the bursting "Archies," and this time manages to take the photograph successfully.

Only one more is left, but before there is time to take it Jimmy suddenly jumps

on his seat and grabs his gun, pointing to a machine that has appeared, apparently from nowhere, and is diving down on them from the side.

There is a brief stuttering of a machine gun, and the attacker has gone again as suddenly as he appeared, having no desire to carry on a prolonged fight since he has failed in the first attempt.

Jimmy sits down again, and the pilot begins once more to make for his final objective, which is reached without any further adventure except an occasional " Archie."

.

At last the job is finished, and, swinging round, they make for our lines again. Just as they cross them a shell bursts quite close, and, a second later the pilot feels something small and hard graze past his ear.

Instinctively his hand goes up, but almost at the same time he sees the grinning face of his observer watching him, and realises that what he thought was a steel splinter was merely a well-aimed piece of silver paper that once covered some of the indispensable chocolate.

Ten minutes later they land again in their aerodrome, and the camera and box of plates are borne away by a waiting mechanic for the latter to be developed and printed.

“Quite a nice trip, eh?” says Jimmy, clambering out of his seat. “I spotted that ‘Archie’ battery firing, and we’ll get some of our own back for this some time.” The pilot was busy examining a broken strut and the torn fabric of one plane; he looked up eagerly,—

“Did you really? Good work. He

shall get it hot some day. Now come and have some lunch," and they stroll off to the mess again.

.

Three-quarters of an hour later an exultant Jimmy rushes into the ante-room where his pilot is reading the two-day-old paper. "The C.O. is horribly bucked with your efforts, old man. Jolly good set of pictures."

Waking up Fritz

Waking up Fritz

“THAT’S all, Andrews. You quite understand the orders ? ”

“ Quite, sir.”

“ Then tell the others and be ready to leave the ground in twenty minutes’ time. That will do.”

Andrews, who wears a pilot’s wings, and three stars on his cuff, gathers up his maps and, saluting smartly, leaves the office.

Outside, five more pilots are standing together talking, each with his leather coat over his arm, goggles and flying cap dangling from the pocket, and as the flight commander comes out they look up expectantly and begin to unfold their maps.

“ Now then, you fellows, gather round ;

we've got to be off in twenty minutes, and there's plenty to do."

"We are the leading squadron, and rendezvous over — at 8,000 at eleven-thirty."

"Here's the place we're going to make a mess of, and we shall cross the lines about here, so as to get round behind it. It's an easy target, a big factory in this bend of the river, and we ought to be able to knock it down quite easily."

He points to the places on the map, gives a few more instructions, and before going over to the sheds imparts a final word of advice.

"There will probably be plenty of Huns wandering about, and we must keep together. Remember, whatever happens, to try and keep in formation. There's safety in numbers."

“Now get off to your machines.”

A quarter of an hour later the six machines, each with its bombs, suspended close to the body like enormous eggs, are drawn up one behind the other at the end of the aerodrome.

The major, watch in hand, stands by the leading machine, and, seeing that all is ready, he nods to the flight commander, who waves his hand in the signal to start up.

At once the roar of the six engines bursts out, and one by one the machines leap forward and skim off the ground.

At first they fly round in a string, climbing steadily, as if playing “follow my leader,” but after a time they begin to close up into the pre-arranged formation, with the result that before moving away from the vicinity of the aerodrome

they are flying close together in a perfectly symmetrical group, the result of constant practice and skilful flying.

.

Formation flying, or flock flying as it is sometimes called, is very pretty to watch from the ground, but it is a very different matter to be piloting one of the machines taking part, and until thoroughly accustomed to it it is a somewhat "nervy" proceeding.

To begin with, owing to the fact that there are no fixed objects in the air, as there are on the ground, to test your motion by, the leading machines seem to be standing still, and your own appears in imminent danger of overtaking and colliding with one of them.

Another machine which has got a little out of place and is flying just above yours

seems to be endeavouring to perch on your top plane, although in reality a good 50 ft. over it; while those on the flanks are always apparently converging in on you, and for the first couple of times there is a great temptation to dive down a 100 ft. or so, so as to be out of the way in case of accidents.

However, these are in nearly every case purely imaginary terrors, but there is one that, although quite harmless if high up, is very real and decidedly unpleasant at low altitudes. This is the risk of getting into the "wash" of the machine in front.

Should this happen, all the controls suddenly become limp and useless, and the machine flops and staggers about in a most alarming manner. But this state of things rarely lasts for more than half a minute, and then, on getting into still

air, the controls seem to grip again, the machine steadies and resumes its course.

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Punctually at half-past eleven the three groups sweep into their places, and the whole squadron moves off in the direction of the German lines.

Above and round it circle the faster scouts which form the escort, ready to drive off any hostile machine attempting to attack the formation.

They cross the lines without interruption, but when nearing the target the sky in front suddenly begins to be dotted with yellow and black puffs, which become more and more numerous as they approach.

The German gunners, having accurately gauged the height of the attacking air squadron, are putting up a barrage of "Archie" shells across its front, through

which it must pass before reaching the target.

As the leading machines get in among the smoke and flying fragments, the formation, which has up to now been flying perfectly steadily, begins to sway and open out slightly.

After a violent five minutes they get through without loss, although many planes and fuselages are riddled with holes, and flying over the factory drop their bombs as each one gets into position.

Then, their mission having been accomplished, they turn homewards, leaving the object of their attention a mass of smoke and flame far below.

The "Archie" gunners start again with redoubled vigour, with the result that one machine, having its engine put out of action by a flying lump of steel, begins to

glide down, the pilot hoping that with a following wind he will recross the lines before being forced to land.

The rest get through safely, with the addition of some more holes to the already tattered planes; but their troubles are by no means over. While they were engaged in destroying the German munition works, a large formation of hostile machines, flying very high, had circled round behind them and cut off their retreat.

The squadron moves straight on to meet the enemy, the escort sweeping forward to attack in order to drive them off before they get a chance of breaking the bombers' formation.

As soon as the opposing forces get within range the stutter and rattle of machine-gun fire breaks out, and as they close the fight resolves itself into a number of isolated combats.

Presently a Hun goes down, turning over and over out of control; but the escort is heavily outnumbered, and, in spite of their efforts, five of the foe break through and dive on the bombing machines below. The latter, however, have kept well together, and receive the attackers with a brisk fire from all sides, which is so effective that they continue to dive until out of range, four of them making off and the fifth continuing its headlong descent in flames.

The fight lasts about ten minutes. Two of the bombing machines that have straggled behind are cut off by three times their number of Huns, and are both shot down; and one of the escort collides with its opponent, both machines collapsing at once. But five of the enemy have been destroyed and their formation completely broken, and soon the remainder make off,

pursued for a short distance by our fighters.

The squadron then resumes its formation, circles round to collect the stragglers, and returns home without any further mishap. The machine that had its engine damaged just manages to cross the German trenches at about 1,000 ft. under heavy machine-gun fire from the ground, and lands on top of one of our own communication trenches, being completely smashed. The pilot, however, is unhurt.

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The following day a brief paragraph appeared in the official communiqué :

“On the morning of the 9th inst. one of our bombing squadrons successfully attacked the factories and works at ——. Many bursts were observed, and several large fires were started.

“Three of our machines failed to return.”

A Ticklish Job

A Ticklish Job

“WELL, and what atrocity have they invented for us to-morrow, old man?”

“Oh, you and I are down for that pleasant little pastime known as ‘barrage bumping,’ at 5.30 a.m., Jimmy, and the C.O. wants to see you at once about it.

“Oh, and you’re flight orderly officer too. Don’t forget to censor the letters this time. I had to do them all last week while you were slacking about in the air all the afternoon.”

“I can’t see why mechanics should be allowed to write letters at all; it’s a most obnoxious habit of theirs. But still, as they do, I suppose I must scrawl my name over reams of waste paper to-morrow.

Oh, well, there's no peace for the wicked. Now I must go and interview our beloved I.O. (Intelligence Officer) about our little trip to-morrow. Cheerio! see you at the sheds in the morning."

He picks up a notebook and bundle of maps and goes out, while his pilot, after bawling to his bătman to call him early, quickly undresses and tumbles into bed.

At 5.45 the next morning a machine is speeding towards the distant lines just above a bank of thin white mist.

Jimmy, the observer, still rather peevish at what he considers the unnecessarily early start and entirely unmoved by the splendid sunrise, sits huddled in his seat swathed in scarves, mufflers, and silk handkerchiefs.

There has been a "show" on during the night, and their duty is to get in touch

with our infantry in the newly won positions, returning as soon as possible to report what they have seen. The attack being only just over, the artillery fire is still heavy, so that in order to be able to see anything it is necessary to fly as low as possible, often in the thick of the shells of our own barrage.

As they approach the lines, the pilot puts the nose of his machine down and gradually loses height until they are flying over our batteries at about 500 ft. There the noise is appalling, as the unceasing coughs and grunts of our guns can be clearly heard above the roar of the engine, some of them sounding as if they were no more than a few yards away.

The machine quivers and sways in the "bumps" caused by the rushing shells, and every now and again it is possible

to catch a fleeting glance of a long, sinister black shape hurtling by.

Jimmy, knowing his part of the job is about to begin, sits up and, wriggling into the position from which he can best observe, arranges his maps, puts his notebook handy, and nods to the pilot.

The machine swings eastward over the field batteries, which are pelting away as hard as they can, the continuous rattle of the reports sounding like a gigantic machine gun; and they go on towards the inferno of smoke, sound, and flying debris that marks the captured position and the trenches beyond it.

While the machine is kicking and jumping in the stream of projectiles, both ours and the Germans', the latter often bursting with a deafening "Cr-r-r-ump" just underneath, the engine keeps up its steady

droning note, showing that nothing is wrong there; but pilot and observer, straining their eyes through the smoke and haze, looking for signs of our infantry, seem not to be aware of these things except for the jerking movements of the former's hand on the stick as he automatically controls the erratic progress of his machine.

Suddenly the observer points to a spot still farther into the pall of smoke, and the pilot, gazing hard, sees the signal they require, well in advance of the place they expected it, which proves that the infantry has dashed on and taken more than was hoped for.

They head in that direction, dropping still lower as they go, until the machine seems to be missing by inches the mangled remains of such houses and trees as are still standing here and there.

Jimmy, after a rapid survey of the surrounding trenches, in which the khaki of our men can be easily distinguished from the German field grey, begins to write hurriedly, glancing round now and again for fresh information.

Suddenly a machine gun begins to crackle in a forward trench still held by the enemy, and after a few seconds they both hear the "phit-phit-phit" of bullets whistling by.

The pilot frowns and starts to swerve from side to side at odd moments, so that the machine becomes a more difficult target for the German gunners, but the course is still roughly up and down over the front trench line we now hold. Jimmy takes no notice, but goes on writing faster than before. Then, after a minute or two more, he shuts his notebook, nods

to his pilot, and, as the latter swings the machine round homewards with a sigh of relief, gets up to his gun and sends a parting stream of lead into the German trenches.

When they get well behind our batteries, Jimmy hands back a neatly rolled message-bag containing the precious information that is being so eagerly waited for at headquarters, and a little later, when passing over the remains of the château where the Staff is quartered, the pilot drops it over the side. Down goes the nose of the machine, the wind hums through the flying wires, and the group of officers and orderlies watching seems to rush up to meet it. Within 20 ft. of the ground, and directly over the waiting Staff, the pilot drops the bag, which flutters almost into the eager hands waiting for it.

He then pulls the machine upwards, and the impetus gained in the downward swoop carries it up several hundred feet again.

They circle round once, then, with a wave to those below, start homewards, and ten minutes or so later are safe back in their aerodrome.

As pilot and observer clamber out, their flight commander comes up, and after a few questions about the job, says: "We have just had a message from the batteries saying a 'contact' machine was brought down about half an hour ago by one of our own shells. Must be one of Number — squadron's people, I suppose, as you two are back all right."

"I'm not surprised, poor devils," says Jimmy; "the nasty things are thick enough. . . . Is breakfast ready?"

“Nightbirds”

“Nightbirds”

“FLIGHT SERGEANT !”

“Yes, sir.”

“‘A’ Flight will be bombing to-night at 10.15. I want my own machine and Numbers 2254 and 6537 ready at half-past nine sharp. Got that ?”

“Yes, sir. But Number 2254 had the port navigation light broken yesterday when landing, if you remember, sir, and we haven’t been able to get a new one fixed yet. Shall I try and——”

“Oh, yes, I had forgotten for the moment. Well, get Mr. Richards’ machine ready instead. The usual bombs and three drums of ammunition each, and see

that there is a good supply of Verey light cartridges, mind. Have everything ready by half-past nine. The engines will be run twenty minutes before we start."

"Very good, sir."

The flight sergeant salutes and turns away towards the hangars, and the flight commander goes off to the C.O.'s office to discuss the details of the evening's work.

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The path from the camp to the aerodrome runs through a small wood, and in the darkness two hurrying figures carrying armfuls of flying kit come into violent collision. During the moments of re-primination and abuse that follow, they recognise each other's voices.

"Hullo, Billy, have you clicked for this moonlight ramble too? I was told Stanton was the third."

“So he was to have been, but the clumsy ass banged his wing-tip into a tree yesterday, and smashed one of the navigation lamps, so I have got to take his place.”

“Well, what are you grouching about? It is a topping night, and it is going to be quite a good stunt. At any rate, you will have done your turn, and Stanton may come in for something much worse next time—a trip to Berlin in a snowstorm or something equally pleasant.”

The only reply is a disgruntled “Umph!” and they start off again towards the aerodrome.

The broad, level space is dotted with a row of spluttering flares, and outside the hangars, clearly outlined against the blaze of electric light streaming from the open doors, stand three machines. Each has a row of bombs under the fuselage, and a

machine gun ready mounted in its place, while a swarm of mechanics flits to and fro making the necessary final adjustments.

A metallic clinking comes from the engine cowling of the nearest, where a figure in oil-spattered overalls is busy with a spanner, but as the two pilots approach he climbs down from the petrol-box on which he has been standing, and reports the machine ready for duty.

Each examines his craft carefully, tests the bomb-releases, and gives the engine a trial run. Then they light cigarettes and stroll over to get their final instructions from the flight commander who is leading the expedition, and to exchange chaff with some of the other members of the squadron who have come, with the express purpose of making sarcastic remarks, to see them off.

“I say, Dicky dear, don’t you feel horribly frightened of flying alone in the dark? Shall I come with you and hold your hand?”

“Be brave, Richard, my boy, but above all be careful. Remember Marie at the Hôtel Rochefort. Ah, les aviateurs, comme ils sont héroïques, I don’t think.”

“Bet you ten to one you crash on landing, Billy. I’ve just had a look at the wheels of your machine; they’re frightfully loose. In fact, I shouldn’t be a bit surprised if they drop off in the air. Mind you don’t bump into any clouds while you’re out,” and so on.

The arrival of the C.O. is the signal for the start, and, pulling on goggles and gloves, the three climb into their seats.

The flight commander goes first, roaring down the lane between the flares and

fading away into the darkness beyond. The other two follow at intervals of ten minutes.

Richards, the disgruntled one, who is the last to take off, creates some excitement by steering straight for one of the flares, knocking it over with his undercarriage, and leaving a miniature prairie fire behind him caused by the burning paraffin streaming over the dry grass.

He circles round for a while until satisfied with the purring hum of his engine, and then sets out for the lines.

Although the details of the landscape are invisible, the prominent features stand out with a startling distinctness. Roads show up a dirty white colour, water has a dull, leaden gleam, and the black masses of woods stand out well against the different shades of grey of the surrounding fields.

Behind, the twinkling flares on the aerodrome can be seen for miles; in front, the unceasing line of star shells, gun flashes, and shell bursts show where the trenches lie.

In bright moonlight the ground can be seen from the air almost as clearly as by day. And even when the night is dark and there is no moon, at a time when a person trying to make his way across country finds considerable difficulty in preventing himself from getting hopelessly lost, a pilot with a fair knowledge of the lie of the surrounding neighbourhood and a good sense of direction can keep his course without much trouble. To the man in the last machine the navigation lights of the one far in front appear as a faint triangle of bright dots, every now and then changing their position as the

pilot alters his course. And just as he crosses the lines he sees, away to his left, the red port light of a machine flash past, going in the opposite direction. The flight commander, having dropped his bombs, is on his way home again.

There is all the difference in the world between war-flying by day and by night, and in many ways the latter is by far the pleasanter of the two. At night there are no hostile machines to worry about, and the pilot can give all his attention to the job on hand.

Anti-aircraft fire, even when assisted by searchlights, is not nearly so effective as by day, and often there is none at all. Sometimes the Hun experiments with weird and wonderful kinds of luminous "Archies"—strings of flaming balls that soar into the heavens—and just when you

are expecting some marvellous pyrotechnic effect quietly go out, and such like; but they do very little harm, and once one has recovered from the first shock of surprise, there is very little to fear from them.

But the one thing that is always a source of the greatest anxiety to a pilot flying in the dark is his engine. A forced landing in daylight, although attended by a certain amount of risk, has not many terrors for a fairly experienced pilot, but at night it is an entirely different matter. Engine failure in the darkness, even when flying over country that is perfectly familiar, is not a light matter. So that when the engine seems to be running more smoothly than it has ever done before, there is always the lurking dread at the back of the pilot's mind that it will let him down

before he gets safely home, and the slightest irregularity in the running is at once magnified in his imagination into serious trouble.

However, Richards's engine is running smoothly enough, and shows no signs of breaking down. As he nears his objective, a large dump on a railway siding, the flickering flare of the trenches fades away behind, and the ground lies dim and still again beneath him.

Suddenly, right in the middle of the cluster of sheds and stacks of cases that form the target, two bright flashes appear, followed by several more on the railway line and in the adjoining fields. The second bomber is doing his work, and from the fire that springs up, and begins to rage furiously round the siding, it is apparent that his missiles have taken good effect.

As he gets over the blazing mass, Richards finds, much to his disgust, that the job has been done only too thoroughly, and that it would be no further use to let go his own cargo of bombs. So, after making a rough estimate of the damage to put in his report later on, he goes off towards the nearest station in search of some other target on which to unload them.

But the Huns, having been twice rudely disturbed already, are now on the alert, and the bright beam of a searchlight flashes into the sky a few miles away. As it moves to and fro trying to find his machine, Richards, anxious to *strafe* something, throttles down his engine, and dives swiftly towards the base of the beam. Just as the light catches him his machine gun begins to stutter, and spurts a stream

of bullets down the beam. The light goes out abruptly, and the crew bolt for their lives, leaving two of their number lying motionless beside the projector.

He smiles to himself, and, pulling the machine out of the dive, heads for another beam that has sprung up a short distance away. But as the hum of the engine is heard approaching, that also goes out without waiting to be fired on, and he goes back to the station to get rid of his bombs.

There is a long train standing in one of the sidings. All his shots miss it. But one of them sets fire to a large shed close by, and two explosions on the track, one at each end of the station, show that it has been successfully isolated from the rest of the line, and the train bottled up

there for the night at any rate. The remainder fall harmlessly in open fields, but Richards is well satisfied with the evening's work, and having put a finishing touch to the confusion which now reigns below by firing a few dozen rounds at the locomotive and wagons, he starts homeward again.

Just as he recrosses the trenches his engine gives him an uncomfortable five minutes by spluttering slightly, but it picks up again, and soon the lights of the aerodrome are beneath his machine once more.

The ground being free from obstructions, Richards glides smoothly down the line of flares, finishing up as he started by knocking one of them over. This time the tail plane catches fire, and before the rush of frantic mechanics can extinguish the

flames the rudder and tail skid are also badly burnt.

After a brief and fiery interview with the C.O., who closes his remarks with a threat of transferring the luckless pilot to the Tank Corps if he persists in pushing things over, Richards is heard to remark with some heat to a friend waiting outside the office that at any rate he did not think it a bit funny to take a fellow away from a perfectly good game of bridge and then let him in for that sort of thing.

Lost Soles

Lost Soles

“Have you seen the ducks go by-ee ? Quack, quack !”

“What a horrid noise. For heaven’s sake——”

“For their morn-ing wa-a-a-alk. Quack, quack !”

“Shut up and listen. Roscoe, stop that funny business with the coal-scuttle; you’re on the early patrol to-morrow.”

“Toddling along. Oh, my-ee—— !”

“Oh, here’s this beastly fellow with the orders ! Gentlemen, this song will be continued in a few moments. Now, then, Willy, hurry up ; can’t you see we’re having a concert ?”

“Is that what it was? Sounded more like——; but never mind. Roscoe, you’re on the 5.30 patrol to-morrow morning, particulars to be had in the office.”

“Oh, Lord! what have I done to deserve such a——? Look out, you clumsy ass; that’s my whisky you’re washing the piano with!”

“Peace, little one! Strong drink isn’t good for those who have to get up early. Johnson, a lemon-squash for Mr. Roscoe. The rest of the flight—that is, Jones, Stanhope, Liddell, and you, ‘Fireworks’—are on photography at 11 o’clock. Details will be issued later.”

“And what about yourself, Mr. Orderly Officer?”

“Ah! Our esteemed flight commander, having observed my good work of late, and knowing my magnificent capabilities,

has chosen me for a most hazardous duty, one that requires considerable skill and presence of mind."

"Come on, get it out! You don't seem very perturbed about it, anyway."

"At 10.30 to-morrow I leave the squadron in a tender——"

"Well?"

"And proceed to Amiens."

"What?"

"To buy food for you greedy mob of hooligans. Good night, dears!" And he fled, followed by a deluge of ancient sevenpenny novels, hurled by the disgusted inmates of "B" Flight mess.

"Well, of all the low-down blighters! He always manages to get that job, while I haven't had a joy-ride for months. And I know——"

"Oh, shut up, 'Fireworks'! We all

know what would have happened if you had gone. Lot of food we should have had then, I expect. Besides, Suzanne doesn't love you any more. I saw her getting on very well with the military policeman when I went in last week ; and, at any rate, Willy has got a few capabilities as far as providing for his inside goes. We shall have a good dinner to-morrow, boys. And now let us return to our ducklings."

The strains of the cracked piano, which had been purchased for a fabulous sum from an old woman in the neighbouring village, broke out again, accompanied by a roaring chorus of "Quacks!" and Williams grinned as he made his way across the aerodrome to pin the orders up in the flight office. Having done that, he went round to the transport lines, and

ordered a tender for the morning, and then went to bed, falling asleep instantly, in spite of the din going on in the mess hut a few yards away.

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At eleven o'clock next morning, while the rest of the flight were starting off on the morning's work, Williams, clad warmly in his leather flying-coat and fur gauntlets, was bowling down the broad, tree-bordered road on the front seat of a light tender, trying to think of something special to bring back for the evening meal.

On his arrival in the town he told the driver to garage the car and come back at two o'clock for orders, and then wandered off in search of amusement. Twelve-thirty found him seated in an American Bar with half a dozen kindred spirits from neighbouring squadrons, who were on the

same errand as himself, and after satisfying their thirst they adjourned to the best hotel in the place for lunch.

During that meal he obtained the priceless information that fresh fish, a rare delicacy anywhere near the lines, was to be obtained at a certain shop hitherto unknown to him, and, hurriedly finishing his lunch, he rushed off to the place to get what he could.

By four o'clock his purchases were completed, and he started back, feeling very pleased with his day's work, and contemplating the delight of his companions when they found there was fried sole for dinner. It was a good stroke of business, he thought, and would, in all probability, lead to his getting the job again, a prospect that afforded him much satisfaction.

As they approached the aerodrome an

“ Archie ” battery that was stationed close by opened fire, and, looking up, Williams saw a machine, surrounded by a cloud of white smoke puffs, heading in the direction of the camp. Just as they reached the muddy lane leading to the hangars, the Hun seemed to get directly overhead, and at the same moment there was a rush and a roar, and a machine swept up over the sheds and began to climb rapidly towards the raider.

Shouting to the driver to take the car round to the mess and unload, Williams jumped out, dashed across the field to his hut by a short cut, and began a feverish search for his field-glasses, the better to watch the fun. The moment he emerged with them there was a whistle and an ear-splitting crash, followed shortly afterwards by two more, and fountains of earth and

stones spouted up in the field alongside the aerodrome.

There was a wild dash for cover, and officers and mechanics who were standing about in scattered groups watching the raider's approach, flung themselves into the nearest ditch. The equipment officer, losing his head completely, rushed into the guard tent, and felt quite safe under the canvas. The sentry on duty, being a resourceful man with visions of a V.C. and his name in the papers, refused to shelter, and, climbing on to an empty petrol box in order to get nearer the foe, blazed wildly with his revolver at the Hun circling 6,000 feet above!

Two more bombs fell, one in a small wood several hundred yards away, and the other just at the back of the hangars, without, apparently, doing any serious

damage, and then the German, having finished his supply of missiles, began to make off in the direction of the lines. But a formation of British machines returning from a patrol had appeared in the distance, cutting off his escape, and with considerable pluck he turned at bay and offered battle to the machine that had just left the ground to attack him.

The onlookers on the ground, having emerged from their places of refuge now that the bombardment was over, saw the nose of the machine dip suddenly, and heard the rattle of a machine gun as the German swooped down on the British 'plane, still a thousand feet or so beneath him. But as he swept within effective range the latter craft swerved up and over, and, having performed a complete loop, came down close behind his tail, its gun

spitting a reply to the sudden attack. But the stream of bullets missed its mark, and the Hun turned sharply to one side out of range for the moment. So the fight went on, the combatants swooping and twisting, the sun gleaming on planes and bodies, making them look like two big yellow butterflies at play, while the spectators below criticised and applauded each swift manoeuvre of friend and foe alike.

Suddenly Williams, who had been poking about behind the sheds looking for his cap, which had fallen off in the rush for shelter, burst upon the group of officers outside the mess, spluttering with rage and using such language that for the moment their attention was distracted from the battle going on above.

“Hullo, Willy! What’s your trouble? Did you hurt yourself very much when

you fell over that petrol can? Little boys should look where they are going, even when there is a nasty Boche dropping things about."

"The hound has dropped one of his infernal bombs on——"; but he never finished his announcement, for just at that moment a voice cried, "He's got him, good old Charlie," and all eyes were turned skywards once more.

The German machine was dropping earthwards like a stone, but long before it reached the ground it flattened out, and began to glide smoothly downwards at the usual speed, and it soon became evident that it was going to land. A lucky shot had struck the engine, rendering it quite useless, and although the pilot was unhurt and his gun still in working order, there was nothing left for him to do but come

down and surrender. But misjudging the direction of the wind, he tried to land the wrong way, and piled his machine up in the middle of the aerodrome; and, being unable to extricate himself from the wreckage, was prevented from carrying out his intention of setting fire to his craft.

There was a general stampede towards the crash, all—except Williams, who remained, scowling blackly, outside the Mess—rushing to assist the vanquished pilot; but the incensed caterer, smarting under what he considered a personal injury, stood where he was until the German was led towards him, jabbering excitedly to his captors in broken English. Then, pushing his way through the crowd, he confronted the unconscious object of his wrath.

“You—you—you——” he began, but,

seeing the look of astonishment on the prisoner's face and the grins of his fellow officers, he stopped, and then, in his sweetest manner, began afresh.

"My dear Herr Lieutenant, we are delighted to see you, but, unfortunately, you have chosen a most inauspicious time for dropping in, as, I am grieved to say, we have no dinner for you to-night."¹

"So! Dat vos bad. But I haf always heard that you English airmen live like der brince, *nicht wahr?* "

"True, and you would have dined in a princely manner to-night if you hadn't gone and cooked the whole show completely."

¹ It used to be the custom, both in the British Air Services and in the German, to treat a captured pilot who was uninjured as a guest of the Squadron which brought him down, for the remainder of the day. Afterwards—prison camp, of course!

“I do not understand. You zay der vas no dinner, and then you say I haf cook him. *Nein*, I do not understand. How vas it der vas nodings to eat ? ”

“Because, *mein Herr*, I am sorry to say you have blown up the lot.”

A “Dud” Day

A "Dud" Day and a Visit to the Batteries

THERE was no sign of the usual early morning bustle among the group of low, wooden huts forming the officers' quarters, and except for a couple of melancholy-faced bâtmen who wandered to and fro with armfuls of boots and belts, and a few frightened-looking French mongrels lurking round the kitchen, everything was quiet. The thick white mist which comes up just before dawn three days out of every five between November and April in Flanders enveloped the camp, and the comfortless drip of moisture was the only sound that broke the silence.

Presently a door at one end of the long

row of huts opened, and a tall, fair-haired pilot came out with flying kit thrown over his arm. He surveyed the cold, damp scene with a frown of disapproval, and after gazing thoughtfully at the path, several inches deep in mud, started along it towards the mess. On opening the door he found a well-meaning but unintelligent orderly, under the impression that he was sweeping the floor, raising a thick cloud of dust which soon settled down again on the chairs and tables. Having banished the sweeper with a few well-chosen remarks, he warmed his hands at the stove, and then, feeling in rather a better frame of mind, sat down at one end of the long table to wait for his breakfast.

A moment later another pilot entered, who repeated the hand-warming process, and then sat down near him.

"Morning, Hoppy. Fine weather for the British aviator, what? Are you on the early job?"

"Yes, I am, and just my rotten luck too. A perfectly priceless shoot with an 8-inch how' battery on a building as big as the whole camp put together, and then it turns out like this."

"Good Heavens, man, you don't mean to say you're fed up because it's dud? Why, I've not been so pleased for a long while. I haven't had a rest for ages. Do you think there is any chance of it clearing?"

"You never know; sometimes it all clears off by twelve o'clock, and sometimes it stays all day. Let's hope it goes."

"Let's hope it does nothing of the sort. You won't miss much if your shoot doesn't come off. I had a go at that

target two days ago with some nine-two's and there isn't much left to hit."

"I wonder why we're taking it on again then."

"The Intelligence discovered yesterday that it wasn't a tin hat store as they had thought, and they now suspect it to be some other kind of store. Wonderful people, aren't they? So you're to have another go in case the Huns have filled it up again since I knocked most of the stuffing out the other day."

Their breakfast over, they went into the adjoining hut, which, on the strength of two small wooden tables, some wicker arm-chairs in various stages of collapse, a tired-looking gramophone, and a letter rack, was styled the ante-room. After stoking the iron stove for some few minutes, Palmer, the second arrival, groped his way,

through the thick fog which resulted, to one of the tables and began to write letters. Hopkinson, wishing that he hadn't got up so early, flung himself into the strongest chair and lit his pipe. Presently he got up, and, forgetting the mess rule that the gramophone was not to be played before eleven o'clock, started it churning out a violent march played by a still more violent French band. Just as the middle of the record was reached and the exhausted mechanism began to run down, the door opened and a flight commander came in.

"I say, you fellows," he said, "as I passed the C.O.'s hut, he shouted to me that if that infernal din didn't stop at once he'd have you put under arrest. He's trying to shave, and the cornet solo has made him cut himself three times already."

"Oh, Moses," groaned Hoppy, "that's

torn it! Come along, Tyres, come across to the sheds and inspect your machine. With any luck the angry one will have gone to his office by the time we get back."

"I suppose I've got to, thanks to your idiocy. What on earth did you want to start that frightfulness for?" and picking up his unfinished letter, Palmer followed him out, grumbling.

There were few signs of life about the cluster of hangars looming faintly through the enveloping whiteness with their heavy canvas curtains tightly drawn, and the broad expanse of the aerodrome was completely hidden. Occasionally a mechanic, clad in dirty brown overalls, appeared hurrying along the cinder path, and, turning off by one of the sheds, disappeared through an opening in the sodden folds that hung across the entrance.

Inside stood the machines, the fabric of their planes, usually tight as a drum, now slightly flabby and glistening with moisture, and the polished metal fittings dulled and tarnished by the damp. Each propeller blade was protected by a long waterproof case rather like the finger of an enormous glove; the engines were shrouded in shapeless tarpaulins, and round each craft flitted two or more mechanics busy with spanners and oil cans, preparing their charges for the day's work.

The two pilots spent forty minutes or so examining the work on their respective machines, feeling the tension of bracing and control wires, examining the repairs made in places where "Archie" had recently caused some minor damage, now and then putting a question to the rigger

or fitter in charge, and generally satisfying themselves that everything was as it should be. Palmer, who had had some trouble with a cracked cylinder the day before, had his machine wheeled out into the open, and ran the engine for a few minutes to see that it was now giving its maximum power. While he did so, Hopkinson came and stood beside him, bracing himself against the rush of air from the propeller by grasping the side of the pilot's seat with both hands, and shouting useless advice which was completely drowned by the noise of the engine.

The test being satisfactory, the machine was wheeled back again, and they wandered slowly back to their quarters.

By this time most of the squadron were up and had finished breakfast, and there was a lively discussion going on as to what

was to be done if it remained "dud" all day. Some decided to try to work off long arrears of correspondence, others began to arrange parties for bridge or poker for the afternoon and evening, while a proposal that a deputation should be sent to the adjutant to supplicate for a tender to take a certain number into Amiens for the evening met with universal approval.

By half-past eleven the mist had lifted, but it did not clear any further, heavy clouds forming a few hundred feet up, and by lunch time it had begun to rain in the dogged sort of way that looks as if it might go on for a week.

After lunch the following notice was found pinned on the notice board in the ante-room: "A light tender will leave the squadron at 3.30 p.m. to fetch Lieutenants Munroe and Skipton returning from leave.

Flight commanders will detail from each flight two officers wishing to avail themselves of this opportunity of visiting Amiens. Names to be brought to the squadron office not later than 3 p.m.—
Signed: W. BENSON, Major Commanding
No — — Squadron, R.F.C.”

The uproar that ensued when every one had read the notice and was doing his best to persuade his flight commander to put him down as one of the two from his flight was quelled by the entry of the adjutant with a second announcement which he pinned up beside the first. But no sooner had that been read than a fresh tumult broke out mingled with exclamations of disgust from some and derision from others, for the gist of it was that there would be another tender leaving the squadron at 2.30, and all pilots and

observers originally detailed for jobs that day would be conveyed in it to visit the respective batteries they were to have worked with had it been fine.

"Well, 'Tyres,' my lad, are you still overjoyed that you have not got to adventure yourself into the air to-day?" said Hopkinson, finding his friend swearing heartily in front of the notice board. "I hope you appreciate the efforts of the authorities in arranging such a pleasant change for you after the ardours of flying. By the way, with whom were you down to 'shoot' this morning?"

Palmer turned to him scowling, but at the last question his angry look faded away and a broad grin spread over his face. "I wasn't going to shoot with anybody. I was down for photography. Good Lord, there's a chance I shan't have

to go mud splodging after all. Here, get out of the way. Where's Morton? I must go and see about this," and he dashed out of the mess.

Hopkinson glanced at his wrist-watch, and, finding it was after two, retired to his hut to make himself as mud and water proof as possible.

Soon after half-past two a covered tender containing ten somewhat morose officers and a heap of gas masks and tin hats moved away from the camp, and jolted and splashed along the one-time magnificent main road in the direction of the lines. The bad temper soon wore off, however, and by the time the first village was reached the party was as hilarious as if it had been a guest night in mess.

The surface of the road and the congestion of the traffic became worse as they

went eastwards, and in consequence progress became slower and slower. The deep ditches on either side were filled with liquid mud right up to the level of the roadway, and many times disaster was only avoided by a hair's breadth as they struggled past a body of troops or a column of lumbering shell lorries on their way back from the front area.

Twice they were held up for over a quarter of an hour in a dilapidated village such time as a couple of harassed military policemen shepherded a brigade of field artillery and a convoy of empty lorries past the crossroads, while a constant stream of dispatch riders and staff cars tried to worm its way through the tangled mass. Once, when for the first time they had a clear stretch of road in front and ventured to increase their pace

to a moderate fifteen to twenty miles an hour, they swung round a corner to find a huge dump on either side of the road, and another long line of lorries just in front crawling along at a snail's pace. No sooner had the driver begun to pass the column than they were promptly chased by a mounted policeman, who inquired with considerable heat why they had disregarded the notice that lorries were not to proceed at more than four miles an hour past that spot, what their number was, and what unit they belonged to.

Hopkinson, who was sitting in front with a map and acting as guide, quite unrecognisable as an officer in the weird garments in which he had muffled himself up, replied that a Flying Corps tender was not a lorry, not even a young one, and even if it had been, it was carrying officers on

duty, and, therefore, was permitted to exceed the four-miles-an-hour limit, and ended up by taking the number of the now apologetic policeman himself.

One other delay occurred before reaching their destination, and that was when the driver, slowing down on a hill to avoid a mule limber which was slithering erratically towards them, accidentally stopped his engine which steadfastly refused to start again. After considerable exertions he decided to try letting the car run a short way backwards down the hill, then putting the clutch in with the engine reversed. The plan succeeded admirably, but caused disaster to befall one member of the party. An excitable Irishman, freshly out from home, who was sitting inside unaware of what was happening, as soon as the car began to run backwards

jumped out on the tail-board with a cry of "Begorrah, we're tail sliding into the ditch!" and when the clutch went in with a jerk, fell off into the muddy road and performed the tail slide with his own person. However, he was rescued from the slough, and a considerable quantity, though not all, of the mud scraped off with the rim of a tin hat, and the journey continued.

Soon after four the tender drew up in the centre of a much-battered village about three-quarters of a mile from the front-line trenches hidden from direct observation by the enemy by a rise in the ground, and the party scrambled out into the street, slinging gas helmets over their shoulders and unfolding their maps. Hopkinson, who, as the senior officer, was in charge of the party, made his way to the

only undamaged house in the place, where a siege artillery group-headquarters had taken up its abode, and reported the arrival of his band. Having told the colonel who they were and what they had come for, he went back, and, after ordering the tender driver to return for them in two hours' time, split the party up into pairs and sent them off to find the respective batteries they had come to visit.

When they had started off, he and his observer set out to look for the howitzer battery they had been going to "spot" for that morning, and, after half an hour's search through the mud, found the position just behind the ruins of a fair-sized farmhouse a few hundred yards out of the village. The carefully camouflaged gun pits were snugly hidden in the remains of the orchard, and a short way off in the

side of a sunken road they discovered the officers' mess dug-out. The battery commander and his subalterns gave them a hearty welcome, and, squeezing the visitors as best they could into the confined space, provided them with tea and cigarettes. After discussing the details of the shoot and exchanging a certain amount of "shop," they went out again and were taken into one of the emplacements where the subaltern in charge of the section discoursed eagerly on the habits and working of his pets, and, much to the disgust of Hopkinson, who came out complaining that his ear drums had been completely shattered, insisted on firing two or three rounds to show how it was done. At about a quarter to six they said good-bye to their hosts, and, with their heads crammed with the most minute directions

as to the way, started out again for the rendezvous.

The afternoon had been remarkably quiet, but before they had got very far the Evening Hate started, and, as battery after battery got into its swing, the noise became appalling. Back at the aerodrome where the reports of each individual gun were dulled and blended into a confused rumble, even a heavy bombardment had not seemed very disturbing, but here in the middle of it each ear-splitting detonation appeared to come from somewhere close at hand, and with his head ringing and every nerve tingling, Hopkinson swore a vow to have as little as possible to do with the gunners in their native haunts beyond an occasional duty visit.

When they reached the village cross-roads, the tender was waiting, all but

three of the party having reassembled, and ten minutes later two more arrived. A brief examination proved the missing member to be Palmer, who, having been unsuccessful in his attempt to evade the outing, had gone off by himself to call on a couple of 18-pounder batteries rather further away than the rest. A quarter of an hour went by and there was still no sign of him, but just as it had been unanimously decided that if he hadn't put in an appearance within another five minutes they would leave him to get back as best he could, a dishevelled figure was seen approaching along the road. But even then they did not realise it was Palmer until he had almost reached the tender, so bedraggled was his condition.

"Where the devil have you been all this time, and how did you get into that

mess?" asked Hopkinson, as the hatless, mud-soaked figure drew near. But the only reply was a muttered "Oh, shut up!" and when the truant had scrambled into the car, liberally scattering mud and filth over those already there, he took his place in front, and gave the word to start back.

Soon after half-past seven they drew up again in front of the squadron office, and, having reported their return, the party split up, each officer at once rushing off to his hut to change for dinner.

This is one of the great advantages that officers of the R.A.F. enjoy over those in other branches of the service. However arduous the day's work may be, whether it entails several long spells of flying, or a muddy and tiring journey to visit Wing headquarters or a battery up at the line,

there are always comfortable quarters to come back to in the evening. And since a squadron remains in one place for a considerably longer period than any other unit, and there is every facility for drawing on the resources of the neighbouring towns and villages, it is possible to make these quarters almost luxurious when compared with the average billets occupied from time to time by other combatant troops.

Infantry officers marching back to the trenches with their battalions after a period of rest far behind the lines, often gaze enviously at the snug camp by the roadside, and wish that they too were members of that happy band whose lot it is to dwell there in comfort. But the next day, perhaps, while sitting at the bottom of one of their detested trenches, as they watch a machine high above en-

veloped in a cloud of shell bursts, or surrounded by enemy planes with the faint rattle of machine guns sounding on every side, they thank their stars that they are safe on the ground.

Hot baths, complete changes of raiment, and a good dinner completely dispelled the feeling of depression which had rather overcome the party while returning, wet and weary, in the jolting tender, and as soon as the meal was over several of them retired to a cosy hut to talk over the doings of the afternoon.

After one or two of the others had related their experiences, Palmer, who had recovered his normal good spirits, thanks to the mellowing influence of several glasses of extremely bad port, and who was now sprawling on his host's bed rapidly emptying a large box of choco-

lates which he had just received from home, suddenly broke into the conversation.

"I say, you fellows, I had the hell of a time this afternoon, and if I ever come across the man who first invented this idea of Pleasant Sunday Afternoons for hard-working airmen there will probably be an awful crime committed."

"Quite so, my lad," agreed a fat observer, perched on the edge of the wooden erection that did duty as washstand, "but all the same I suppose it is a good thing really. Promotes mutual interest between us and the gunners, you know, and all that."

"On the contrary, to-day's effort has completely obliterated my interest in the tribe, at any rate as far as wishing to repeat the performance goes," replied

Palmer somewhat indistinctly, his mouth being full of confectionery.

"What did happen to you, Tyres?—did your field artillery friends throw you out for eating all their rations, or what?" asked some one.

"No. I never found the blighters at all. I floundered about in the filth for some time without coming across any trace of them, so I went and called on a 60-pounder battery which I had been shooting with a few days before. They were very polite, and gave me such a good feed that I felt compelled to apologise for breaking off the shoot in the middle, and to explain that owing to the pressing attention of three Huns, who shot away half my controls, I had to go home rather earlier than I had expected. Then the battery commander actually had the

cheek to ask why I hadn't kept a sharper look-out for enemy aircraft, and said he had seen the Huns coming a long while before they attacked me, and thought I might have done so too. And when I told him that if he had spent his time trying to prevent his rotten guns scoring bull's-eyes in a pond about half a mile away from the target, as I was doing for him, I might have had a little more time to look about, he was very rude, and I thought it was time to leave. After that I lost myself entirely, and every one of whom I inquired the way back to the village told me something different. Whenever I sat down to rest and to try and get my bearings, some enormous gun would go off about ten yards away and blow me head first into the nearest shell hole. I got rather tired of the proceedings, and just

as I was crawling out of one for about the *n*th time, the Huns began putting over some heavy stuff quite close, so I thought it better to stay where I was, hence my soiled condition when I finally rejoined you. When the 'crumping' stopped, I got out, and, after wandering about a bit longer, I met a fatigue party going back who put me on the right track, and then things were easy."

Before his audience had stopped laughing, the owner of the hut, who had gone out to see what the weather was like, came back and broke up the meeting. "Out you get, all of you. It has quite cleared up; clouds all gone; and as I am on the early job, I'm going to bed. Good night, all."

Driven Down

Driven Down

HIGH up among the billowy summer clouds a machine droned steadily to and fro, flying just to the west of the trench line on a regular beat two or three miles long.

The pilot and observer were bored, and every few minutes each glanced impatiently at his watch, wishing the patrol was over. They had already been up for over two hours, and so far nothing had happened to break the monotony of their watch. The vast panorama of the battlefield spread beneath them had become uninteresting with familiarity, no movement was visible on either side of the lines to

catch their attention, and last, but not least, the German anti-aircraft gunners seemed to be asleep, no sudden puffs or black smoke appearing to disturb their quiet course.

Their task was not a particularly hazardous or exciting one in the ordinary course of events, for it consisted in watching for flashes from the almost invisible German batteries, and signalling the position of those thus found to be active to our gunners, who then dealt with them in their own highly effective manner.

But the shelling on the ground seemed to have died away for a time, and up to now they had been unable to spot a single flash. The truth was that the enemy gunners had seen the droning speck moving ceaselessly up and down over their front; and knowing only too well that if

they ventured to fire they would in all probability give away their position and bring swift retribution on themselves, they were waiting patiently until such time as the watcher should go home.

This "flash patrol," as it is called, although often barren of results and a seeming waste of time, is in reality of the greatest importance. It prevents in a large measure the indiscriminate shelling of our back areas at a time when the rest of the front is comparatively quiet. Secondly, when a "strafe" is on, and the German artillery is compelled to open up in reply to our barrage, the immediate wireless calls from the observer on watch up above enable those of our guns detailed for counter-battery work to pick out without delay the targets in most pressing need of attention. At times such as these the

observer can hardly work his key fast enough, and the sight of the whole of the ground directly behind the enemy's trenches dotted with twinkling gun flashes, well repays him for hours of fruitless watching in the past.

But in the case before us there had been no sudden burst of firing by either side, and the observer, a new hand at the game, was tired of the whole proceeding, and anxious to get back to a more congenial occupation on the ground. His pilot was also keen to get the job done, but for a different reason. He knew from experience that the alleys and corners in the rugged cloud bank above them were ideal cover for lurking Hun fighting machines, and that at any moment one or more might swoop down on them without warning. If that were to happen, it was likely that

everything would be over long before assistance could arrive.

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Another half hour passed uneventfully, and then, just as the pilot was thinking of turning homewards, his worst fears were realised, and out of the clouds came hurtling not one, but five squat, blunt-nosed machines, each with the sinister black crosses on wings and tail fin.

The familiar rattle of a machine gun burst from the leader, the noise swelling rapidly as each of the attackers opened fire and closed in. The air was filled with hissing bullets, one of the struts suddenly splintered, and a jagged tear appeared here and there in the fabric covering planes and fuselage.

At the first indication of danger the observer grasped his own weapon, and,

swinging the sights on to the nearest opponent, started firing. The Huns dived singly, each one pouring in a short sharp burst as he got to close range, swerving away when it was over to make room for the next one, and climbing back to be ready for another try. After a few minutes the British machine was riddled with holes, but, thanks to the skilful way in which the pilot handled his craft, no vital spot was hit.

Suddenly the observer's gun jammed. With a muttered curse he bent over it to discover the cause of the trouble. The pilot, realising instantly what had happened, swung the machine over on to a vertical bank, and throttling down the engine began to descend in a fast, even spiral. The attackers, finding that the corkscrew motion of their quarry made it

too difficult a target, stopped firing, and circled round in hopes of getting another opportunity.

As soon as the observer had cleared his gun they swung back to a level course, and he started firing again. Simultaneously two of their opponents swooped down with a fresh outburst from their crackling guns. A flying wire was hit and parted with a loud twang, and the wind screen just in front of the pilot's head suddenly dissolved into splinters of mica. Things were getting too hot, and he started to spiral again.

By this time the fight had lasted nearly ten minutes, and they were within three or four thousand feet of the ground. The Huns, fearful of losing their prey altogether, became more and more impetuous in their attacks, two, sometimes three

diving together, hoping that by filling the air with a hail of lead a chance shot might hit some vital spot, in spite of the turns and twists of the British machine. One of them, prevented from swerving away at the end of his dive by the presence of a comrade on either side, swooped down and under our machine, appearing again below and beyond it. Our pilot, who up to now had been perfectly cool and collected, began to realise that things were almost hopeless, and when he saw one of his enemies suddenly appear below him, he pulled his craft out of the spiral and jammed its nose down hard towards the Hun in front, with the intention of ramming and finishing them both off together.

The manœuvre came within an ace of succeeding, and they could see the scared face of the German pilot when he looked

round and saw them hurtling down on top of him. But the fact that he did look round saved him, and he managed to twist out of the way just in time.

Seeing that he had failed, our pilot once more got into a spiral, and, crouching down in his seat, wondered how much longer they would go on circling down with the infernal stutter and hiss of bullets sounding on every side before one or both of them was hit. The observer was still trying to fire, but the motion of the machine made it extremely difficult to sight on anything, and he was beginning to come to the end of his ammunition.

Round and round they went, gradually dropping lower, while every now and then a fresh burst of fire showed that the Huns were still determined to finish off this insolent British machine which refused to

burst into flames or go spinning earthwards out of control. The ground was getting very close, not much more than 1,500 ft. below, and still they kept on. Suddenly the machine quivered and then side-slipped several hundred feet. The pilot juggled with the controls but nothing happened, and it gradually returned to an even keel, and took up the usual gliding angle. The elevator control wires had been cut, and the machine was practically unmanageable.

But fortune favoured them. Their assailants, finding themselves getting unpleasantly low, at last sheered off and shot up again in search of other game, satisfied with having driven their quarry down.

The moment they had gone, the pilot opened the throttle in hopes of being

able to struggle home somehow or other. But there was no answering roar from the engine, a stray bullet had put it out of action, and there was nothing left but to glide on until they reached the ground and hope to get out of the crash as lightly as possible.

The observer climbed out on the fuselage so that there was nothing to prevent him from being thrown clear, and the pilot, seeing he could do no more, unstrapped his safety-belt and got up on his seat.

A waste of trenches and shell holes rushed up to meet them, there was a sudden splintering shock, the aeroplane turned up on its nose and stood perpendicular for a few seconds, and then slowly toppled over on to its back.

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Ten seconds later they were struggling

to their feet, each inquiring if the other was all right. Both were thrown well clear of the wreckage, and, apart from a thorough shaking, a few bruises, and a hitherto unnoticed gash in the observer's left arm where a bullet had grazed, they were uninjured. So far they had had miraculous escapes, but their troubles were by no means over, the first problem being to find out the whereabouts of the British lines, and the second to get back to them when found.

The sector of the trenches over which they had been flying had, a few days previously, been the scene of an advance by our troops, and they had come down just in the neutral ground between the lines. Fortunately, the opposing forces were separated by more than a thousand yards of undulating ground, and where they

were at that moment they were hidden from the enemy's front line.

However, knowing that their descent was certain to have been observed, and that the German batteries would begin to shell the wreckage almost at once, their first thought was to get away from the spot as soon as possible.

Both the machine guns were found to be undamaged, so each shouldered one, and, taking the last full drum of ammunition, they moved away in the direction they hoped and believed to be the right one. Before they had gone more than a couple of hundred yards the "strafing" began, and, dodging from shell-hole to shell-hole, they pushed on as fast as they could between the bursts. After a while they found they were hopelessly lost, and, fearing to go any further in case they

should get into a still worse position, they took cover in a shell-hole and discussed what they should do next.

They stayed there for about half an hour, and then the bombardment stopped, and a few minutes later, the observer, peering over the side of the crater, saw a group of men in field grey picking its way towards them with the evident intention of reconnoitring the "crash." He whispered the information to his companion, and they decided to keep hidden as long as possible, but if discovery was unavoidable, to do their best to drive off the enemy with a machine gun. Then they would make a bolt for it in the opposite direction to that from which the patrol had come, and trust to luck to get back to our lines.

The advancing Germans came nearer and nearer, until it was quite clear that

they could not avoid being seen much longer. So crawling quietly to the lip of the crater, they laid one of the guns on the ground, and, holding it as firmly as possible on the uneven surface, fixed the last drum in position and opened a series of short bursts on the unsuspecting enemy.

One was hit and fell in a crumpled heap, the rest, taken completely by surprise, dived into the nearest shell-holes, from whence after a pause they began throwing bombs. But these all fell short, and presently matters came to a deadlock.

As it got dark the Huns managed to crawl away in spite of a few shots from the watchers in the big crater, and about half an hour later the latter were discovered by a British patrol which had been sent

to find out the meaning of the firing heard earlier on.

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At half-past nine next morning two figures, covered with mud and laden with souvenirs, walked into No. — Squadron's mess, and in reply to the babel of questions shouted at them from all sides, stated airily that they had been spending the night with a few friends in the —th Blobshires.

Moving Camp

Moving Camp

FOR some time rumours had been going round that the squadron was shortly to move to another sector of the line, exactly when and where nobody knew, and the topic had been widely discussed by all ranks.

The bâtmén's quarters were most prolific of information, and each morning on being aroused every officer found his servant bubbling over with the most detailed particulars regarding their destination and the date of departure. If any one had taken the trouble to trace this information to its source, the greater part would have been found to have originated in the

fertile brain of 2nd A/M. Clarence Chubb, who valeted the Equipment Officer with indifferent success, and who had the reputation of being the champion liar of the squadron. However, no one did take the trouble, and the various highly coloured reports were accepted for the time being, only to be forgotten a day or two later when a fresh crop made their appearance.

The members of the officers' mess spent most of their leisure hours in bombarding the Recording Officer with questions. But that individual, a hard-headed Canadian, who had done his spell of observing, and who had been rendered unfit for further flying by a wound in the leg caused by a splinter of "Archie" some six months earlier, volunteered no information whatever. It would be difficult to say how much even he really knew on the subject,

but to whatever extent his knowledge did attain he held his peace, and when asked by an excited group of officers, who quite thought they had got on the right track at last, whether it was true that they were going to —, he would only give some non-committal answer such as, "Perhaps so," or "It's quite possible."

After this state of affairs had been going on for about ten days, the fact that a move of some sort was imminent was definitely established by a paragraph which appeared one evening in Squadron Orders. It stated that all officers' baggage would be weighed at twelve o'clock on the following day, and that in view of this all kit was to be ready packed before any one left the ground in the morning. The maximum weight allowed would be thirty-five pounds, and any surplus was to be packed up

and sent home within the next few days.

This announcement caused great consternation in the mess, and there was a considerable amount of discussion as to how much kit could be included in order to keep within the prescribed limit. "I suppose a tooth-brush and a pair of goggles will be about all we can take," was the despondent remark made by one pilot, renowned for the enormous number of his belongings. One or two observers, however, took quite the opposite view, declaring that thirty-five pounds was a liberal allowance, and that their kit wouldn't weigh half that. But as some one pointed out, they had only just joined the squadron, having come straight from the trenches where people didn't get a chance to accumulate the vast number

of odds and ends that most airmen collect during a long stay in one place, and their optimistic attitude failed to make any impression on their brother officers.

No one seemed to have the least idea of the weight of anything he possessed, suggestions regarding a pair of boots varying between eight ounces and fifteen pounds, and the conversation ended with the remark that the whole business was absurd. 'They weren't beastly foot-sloggers to be limited to such an infinitesimal quantity of personal luggage, and hadn't they got a whole lot of lorries to carry the stuff in?' It didn't occur to any one that the transport would be heavily burdened when loaded with the business paraphernalia of the squadron alone.

After dinner the mess was practically deserted, everybody having retired to his

hut to try and sort out the most indispensable portion of his kit, and an hour later the language going on in most of them had got beyond the limits of that used in polite society. Only three people remained calm, the C.O. and two veterans who had been with the squadron when the last move had taken place. The former had a car in which he could take anything he liked, and the latter knew that all this preliminary fuss was only a means of reducing the total amount of baggage as much as possible, and that when the time of departure arrived a place would be found somewhere for everything. They were quite prepared to show thirty-five pounds on the morrow, but were firmly determined that when they moved, everything they possessed should go with them. However, as it wouldn't do at all for

everybody to act in the same way, they sat tight and said nothing, leaving the others to decide as best they could what to keep and what to send home.

About a week later an order finally arrived from Wing Headquarters to the effect that No. — Squadron would proceed at midnight of the 12th-13th inst. to the aerodrome at — for service with the —th Wing, machines to be flown over at dawn on the 13th.

At last their destination was revealed, and the officers of No. — Squadron knew that they were in for a hot time once more. When they had first arrived at the scene of their present activities it had been to take part in the preparation for, and accomplishment of, one of the earlier offensives, but during the long period which had elapsed since then things had

quieted down again to a great extent. Now they found that they were in for a repetition of the same proceeding, although from the reports they had heard the coming push was to be on a very much larger scale than anything previously attempted, with a corresponding increase of "frightfulness." And with this prospect before them, they were in two minds whether to be pleased or the reverse at the honour of being chosen to take part in the operations. As the commander of "B" Flight put it, "That's the worst of being an old squadron with a damn good reputation. We get pushed into every bit of blood and thunder that's going. But now we're for it, I suppose it's up to us to show the authorities that we're absolutely It, the one and only crowd for that sort of job."

The time fixed for their departure was

only forty-eight hours ahead when the order came through, and the work of getting everything in readiness began at once. All stores and spare parts had to be collected and loaded on the transport, the photographic hut and wireless station dismantled and the apparatus packed away in the special lorries detailed for the purpose, all "dud" engines, whether in machines or cars, immediately repaired or changed, and innumerable other preparations made. At the same time the usual amount of work over the lines had to be carried on until the last minute possible, with the result that by the evening of the second day the feeling of tension had become so great that it was almost impossible to approach any one with the hope of getting a civil answer to a question.

A pilot of "C" Flight, who had the misfortune to have half the tail plane of his machine shot away during the last patrol, and who only just managed to struggle back to the aerodrome, met on landing, not the sympathetic interest he expected, but an outburst of abuse from his harassed flight commander, who had but a few minutes before finished superintending the packing of the last of his spares. Nevertheless, since it is a rule in the army that whatever is ordered is accomplished, if it is within the bounds of human possibility, by half-past nine the machine was in a serviceable condition again.

Dinner that evening was a very hurried and scanty meal, and no sooner had the officers risen from the table, than a horde of bātmén and mess servants rushed in

and began to remove crockery, furniture, stoves, lamps, and everything else that was movable to the lorry waiting outside to receive them. By eleven o'clock the whole camp was stripped, the transport marshalled in line on the road outside the squadron office, and everything ready for the start. The advance guard, consisting of the C.O.'s car and a light tender, set out half an hour later, and a few minutes before midnight the main body of the column moved off accompanied by much waving of lamps, loud shouts, and whistle signals. But before half a mile had been covered the leading lorry skidded on a particularly greasy bit of road, and slewing round broadside on, stuck fast with the back wheels in the ditch, thereby completely blocking the way. All attempts to get it back on the road proved fruitless

until the whole of its contents had been unloaded into the mud, and it was nearly two hours before the journey was resumed.

As soon as the transport had left the camp, the pilots who were left to fly over in the morning retired to their empty huts, and, wrapping themselves in their leather flying coats, tried to get what sleep they could on the floor. But at the first signs of daybreak they were astir again, and, after a hasty breakfast of bully and tea, they gathered on the aerodrome where the few remaining mechanics were busy bringing out the machines.

When they were all in position, the oil and petrol tanks were filled, the engines run for a few minutes to get them warmed up, and sundry bulky packages stowed away as snugly as possible in the limited space available.

“I hope this machine will get off the ground all right,” remarked Gerold, the heaviest pilot in the squadron, to the corporal who was to be his passenger. “There’s a bulging haversack lashed inside the fuselage, my locker is filled with books, and you have got to squeeze two rugs and a fortnight’s dirty washing into your seat. So what with the two guns, wireless instrument, and ourselves she’s got some load to carry.”

When everything was ready, the senior flight commander gave the word to start, and one by one the machines of the leading flight taxied out and left the ground. All the officer observers had gone by road the night before to their intense disgust, and each pilot had a skilled mechanic with a few simple tools in his pocket as his passenger, so that in the event of a forced

landing owing to engine failure miles away from an aerodrome, he would have a chance of putting things to rights and going on again without much bother.

As each pilot took his seat, the mechanic stood in front in readiness to swing the propeller, and as soon as the engine had been started he climbed into the observer's cockpit and they whirled away.

The scene when the majority of the machines had left the ground resembled a vast aerial Brooklands, the level of the imaginary track gradually rising as they climbed, although the noise of the un-silenced engines was far louder than what is heard during a motor race on the ground. Each craft circled round two or three times until the required height was reached, and then at a signal from the leader, the several flights swung into formation and headed

northwards towards the scene of new activities.

The moment the last machine had skimmed off the ground the rearguard, which consisted of a sergeant and three mechanics, began the final preparations for departure. The telephone instrument was disconnected and packed up, the last few cans of petrol collected, and loaded into the light tender which had been left behind for the purpose, and, having handed over the aerodrome to a guard provided by a neighbouring squadron, they drove away.

The cross-country flight was effected without mishap, and when the formation came in sight of the new aerodrome it broke up, each pilot landing as he saw his opportunity. The advance guard had already arrived, having driven all night without a stop, but the main body of the

transport was still on the road, and as yet nobody had investigated the officers' quarters. So the moment the machines were all safely housed in the hangars, there was a general rush towards the camp, each pilot being anxious to pick the best hut for himself and his friends.

The next few hours were spent in exploring their new surroundings, and then followed a long wait, every one looking anxiously for signs of the transport and the prospect of a meal. The first lorry hove in sight about twelve o'clock, but the one that contained all the mess property did not arrive until nearly two, having had a breakdown only a few miles from its destination, and it was past tea-time before a meal could be prepared. However, before night everything had been unloaded, and the squadron settled down

with the ease and celerity which soon becomes a second nature to most people after a certain amount of active service.

The following two or three days were devoted to flights over the surrounding country and the new sector of the front, in order that every one might become quite familiar with the chief landmarks and the outstanding features of the trench line. Then they started work again, and within a week of the move were hard at it, losing a machine on the first day as the result of a fight with more enemies than they had been accustomed to see in six days, in their old sector.

An incident which occurred forty eight hours after their arrival is worthy of record.

Sargent, a pilot of "B" flight, who had the reputation of being able to make himself comfortable almost to the verge of

luxury anywhere and at any time, while prowling round a pile of miscellaneous stores just unloaded from the transport, seeking what he might devour, discovered a small cast-iron stove of the type usually known as "Stoves, combustion, small, one."

Now, the hut occupied by Sargent and his observer had no heating apparatus whatever, a fact which had occasioned them considerable annoyance, so as soon as it was dark they sallied forth, and, finding the coveted object still in the same place, removed it unobserved to their quarters. There it was at once hidden under the flooring, out of the way of prying eyes, and the miscreants were gloating over their prize when it suddenly struck them that they had no stove pipe.

"Good Heavens, what damn fools we

are," groaned Tubbs, the observer, "once more into the mud, my lad; stove pipe or bust must be our motto."

For two hours they stealthily ransacked the camp, but the search proved fruitless, and they returned sorrowfully to bed, having found nothing beyond a broken exhaust pipe and a few inches of rubber petrol feed.

Next morning they started off on their second aerial trip of exploration, and after an hour or so of wandering over the neighbourhood both were hopelessly bored. Each had the knack of easily remembering landmarks and the general appearance of the ground spread out beneath them, a faculty by no means possessed by everybody, and being also good map readers, they had assimilated all the required knowledge during their first flight. Suddenly Sargent

swung the machine round, and opening the throttle, headed southwards at full speed. Half an hour later they landed on their old aerodrome.

“What on earth have you brought us here for,” asked Tubbs, when they had taxied up to the sheds and climbed out of the machine, “have you just remembered that you left the family jewels behind, or do you merely want to visit the scenes of your happy boyhood once more?”

“Wait and see,” replied his companion. “If you come along with me, I’ll show you something worth seeing,” and he led the way along the familiar path to the officers’ camp. Arriving at the mess kitchen, he flung open the door, and, with a dramatic gesture, pointed to the big iron chimney reaching from the roof to the place where the oven had formerly stood.

"There you are, look at that. Doesn't it look miserable in this deserted hole? It's simply asking for a new home."

It was but a few minutes' work to detach the pipe, and, being made in sections, it was easily carried to the aerodrome and packed away in the available space in the machine.

Then, having started up the engine again, they began the return journey full of triumph at the success of their enterprise.

Sargent at once steered east, intending to fly back along the line of the trenches, never thinking that they might meet any wandering Huns on the way. But before half the distance had been covered Tubbs suddenly saw two black crossed machines but a few hundred yards distant, coming rapidly towards them. He seized

his gun, and, as the first one dived, poured a series of short bursts, as he thought, right into the flashing circle made by the attacker's propeller. But apparently the bullets had no effect beyond making the Hun swerve away to the left, and a few seconds later the second one came hurtling down towards their tail. Again Tubbs pressed the trigger, but after firing a few rounds the gun jammed, and, in spite of his efforts, he could not get it working again. Sargent, seeing what was wrong, began to perform all sorts of aerial acrobatics in hopes of evading the attackers' aim and of getting a chance to use his own gun. But the enemy machines were much superior in speed and power of manoeuvre, and they easily avoided his fire, circling round and firing briskly as opportunities presented themselves.

The fight ended as suddenly as it had begun. Tubbs, after struggling vainly with his weapon for some minutes, resolved on a daring experiment. Picking up the longest piece of stove-pipe from the floor where it had been laid, he rested one end on the edge of his cockpit, jamming it against the gun mounting to prevent it from being blown overboard. With his other hand he drew the loaded "Verey" pistol from the rack, and placed the muzzle inside the end of the pipe. Then the next time one of the Huns closed in to attack, he pointed his improvised gun in its direction and pulled the trigger.

The result exceeded his wildest hopes. The pipe belched forth fire and smoke, and the flaming light sped past the German machine only a couple of feet above the pilot's head, startling that individual so

much that he quite forgot to fire his machine gun, and hurriedly swerved away again. Tubbs immediately reloaded the pistol and waited to see what would happen next, but the Huns had had enough, and whirling round they made off eastwards, full of eagerness to reach their aerodrome and report how they had been attacked by a new British machine carrying a 6-inch gun which fired blazing phosphorus shells!

Tubbs and his pilot grinned broadly at one another, and continued their journey home by the shortest possible route, being anxious not to endanger the safety of their precious cargo any further.

That night they had a roasting fire in their hut, and were the envy of the whole squadron.

A Chapter of Accidents

A Chapter of Accidents

"BET you two francs you don't hit this penny in three shots at fifteen yards, Cherub." The speaker, having succeeded in fixing the coin in question in the centre of a piece of board, rose from his knees and walked back to where his companion was standing. The latter regarded the target critically.

"You're pretty safe, aren't you? However, if you'll lend me your gun, I'll have a shot; this one seems to shoot round the corner."

Having nothing much else to do, Barnes and his observer, the Cherub, were putting in some revolver practice on the impro-

vised range used for testing the sights and the working of the squadron machine guns. So far they had smashed four bottles, reduced an empty petrol can to a mangled remnant of its former self, and broken Barnes's walking-stick. The latter achievement had rather annoyed the owner of the cane, as he had thought it to be impossible, and so he proposed the bet in hopes of getting a little compensation. Fearing that it might not be accepted if he refused to lend his own weapon, he was prompt in handing it over.

The Cherub spent several minutes loading and assuming his stance, and then, after performing sundry elaborate sighting manœuvres, he fired his first shot. The penny remained untouched. But at his second attempt there was a faint thud and the coin disappeared.

“There you are! What about that? Hand over the cash, please.”

“Not so fast, my good man. You only hit the edge of the board, and the penny fell off with surprise. Wait a minute till I fix it up again, and then you can have your last try.”

At that moment they were interrupted by the advent of an orderly with the message that the Major wished to see Mr. Barnes at the office at once.

“Some beastly shoot, I suppose. Come along, Cherub, you’ll be wanted as well, I expect. I’ll let you have all three shots over again another time, which is very generous of me, seeing that you wouldn’t have hit the thing at all if I’d let you go on.”

The Cherub, who secretly was of the same opinion, although unwilling to admit

it, accepted the offer, and together they started back across the aerodrome towards the Squadron Office.

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The group of officers sitting round the fire in the ante-room discussing the remarkable absence of "dud" weather during the previous three weeks, and the enormous amount of work they had had to do in consequence, was suddenly disturbed by the door being thrown open with a crash, and in rushed Barnes, beaming all over his face.

"Drinks all round. Give it a name, you chaps, it's on me this time. Oh, I do feel so bloomin' 'appy!"

"What the devil's the matter with you, Barney, coming in like a stereoscopic whirlwind shouting that you're so happy?"

Has your aunt sent you another pair of bed-socks ? ”

“ No, not this time,” replied the joyful one, sinking into an arm-chair, “ the C.O. has just told me that I can push off on fourteen days’ leave to-morrow morning. Now aren’t you jealous, you wretched mangel-wurzels ? I’ll think of you dodging Barking Benjamin [a particularly offensive Hun Archie, situated in the squadron’s area] when I’m lunching at the Carlton next week with all the youth and beauty I can collect.”

“ But it isn’t your turn on the list for leave, Barney. You told me only yesterday that you didn’t expect it for nearly another three weeks.”

“ Yes it is now. Carruthers ought to have gone, but he was knocked out three days ago, and I come after him. Now I

must go and write letters and tell my people the joyful news."

He got up and was just leaving the hut when his flight commander came in. "Oh, there you are, Barnes! I've just sent an orderly chasing round to look for you. There's a shoot to be done with the 99th Siege, so up you go. You can get all the details from the Cherub, I gave them to him, and you must be off the ground in a quarter of an hour."

Barnes's face fell. "Oh, I say, Harford, I'm going on leave to-morrow, and I don't want to come to a sticky end before I go. Can't I be spared this time?"

"Going on leave, are you? Lucky fellow! I'm sorry, old thing, but you are the only pilot I've got left for this job; all the rest of the flight are working. I'd do it myself, only I'm standing by for

photography in about an hour's time. Besides, you'll feel you have earned your leave all the more if you do a good shoot to-day."

"Um, perhaps I shall, although I can't say I feel much like it just at present. However, I suppose we've got to win the war. Where's the Cherub? I must go and find out about this."

Ten minutes later Barnes was sitting in his machine arranging his maps and notepad, while the engine purred gently in front, getting warmed up for the three hours' work ahead. The usual preliminaries being over, he waved his hand, the chocks were dragged away from the wheels, and with the throttle at its widest they roared across the smooth short grass and into the air.

The Cherub had only just finished test-

ing the wireless instrument, and they were starting off for the lines at about 500 ft., when the engine began to miss badly. Barnes glanced anxiously at the rev. counter. It showed considerably less engine power than it ought to have done, and the needle was jumping erratically, so he pushed the nose of the machine down to keep up flying speed, and swung round towards home again. But before the turn was completed the engine cut out altogether, and they began gliding down. The aneroid showed 450 ft. and the aerodrome was a little under half a mile away. Could they scrape in, or would it be better to make a forced landing in the field below? Before the pilot could decide the field had flashed past, and to get back to it and land into the wind would have meant two complete turns, a risky pro-

ceeding when very low and rapidly losing height, so he kept straight on. Before they had gone much farther it was apparent that they could not get in, and although Barnes kept the machine at as flat a gliding angle as he dared, he was compelled to flatten out about a hundred yards from the spot he had hoped to reach.

Like all the fields in that part of France, the boundary of the aerodrome was marked not by a hedge or fence, but by a ditch about two feet deep and a yard wide. The machine touched the ground in the adjoining field and ran straight towards it. To have tried to swerve round while travelling at that speed would have meant disaster, and the engine being out of action it was impossible to switch it on again and jump the obstacle. Before they had time to realise what was about to

happen, the wheels dropped into the ditch, the under-carriage was wrenched off, and with a rumbling and splintering sound the machine lurched forward on to its nose. There was a dull thud as the engine struck the ground, smashing the propeller to matchwood, the tail swung up in the air, and for the moment it seemed as if they were going to turn over. But the tail came down again in the ditch and the wrecked craft settled down on one wing tip.

“You all right?” shouted Barnes to the observer, hastily unfastening his safety-belt and climbing out of his seat.

“I think so,” replied the Cherub, “but if you wait till I get out and feel myself, I shall be able to tell you better. This is a nice mess, isn’t it?”

“The poor old butterfly does look a bit

bent, certainly. She's been running so well for the last fortnight too, I can't make out what was the matter. The mag. simply went phut, and I couldn't get another kick out of her. I expect one of the terminals got loose; we'll have a look presently. Hullo, here comes the mob with old man Harford leading the way, looking as if he had swallowed a thunderstorm."

A group of officers, N.C.O.'s, and mechanics were running across the aerodrome towards the crash, led by Captain Harford, their flight commander. Finding that neither of the occupants of the machine was hurt, and annoyed at the destruction of one of the best machines in his flight, the latter turned angrily to the pilot.

"What on earth did you try to land

up here for, Barnes, you knew there was a ditch there? Why did you come down again, your engine was running perfectly when you took off? This isn't the way to earn your leave."

Barnes flushed indignantly. "The magneto went dud, and the engine cut out at five hundred. I did my best, but couldn't quite get in, and got stuck in the ditch. The blasted thing ought to be filled in; it will kill some one one of these days."

"Umph. Well, it wasn't your fault, apparently. Go back to the sheds and start off again as soon as you can; this shoot has got to be done at once. You can take my machine, but Heaven help you if you break that! You'd better go now; I'll see about clearing this mess up."

“Sympathetic, isn’t he?” said Barnes, as they walked back to the hangars; “what about our shattered nerves I wonder? Not the way to earn my leave indeed. If anybody needs a rest in Blighty, it will be me after this.”

“What about me, don’t I want a rest?” asked the Cherub. “You don’t seem to realise what a nerve-racking thing it is for an observer to have to fly with a dangerous pilot like you,” he added, grinning.

“Well, of all the ungrateful young devils, you really are the limit. After carting you round for two months without giving you a single bump or dud landing, as soon as we have a little mishap like this you turn round and call me a dangerous pilot. I’ll give you some nerve-racking in half an hour’s time, and after this trip

you can go and fly with one of the new pilots.”

“No, thanks, old thing, I’d rather stay with you. You really fly quite nicely sometimes. Only you’re going on leave——”

By this time they had crossed the aerodrome, and reached the shed containing Harford’s machine. Barnes gave a few brief orders to the flight sergeant, and it was wheeled out, the tanks filled, guns brought from the armoury and fitted in their places, and a wireless instrument placed in the locker made to contain it. Ten minutes later they were off the ground once more.

This time all went well. The engine roared smoothly in front, giving plenty of power with the throttle but three-quarters open. The machine, the best-rigged in the flight, climbed steadily, carrying them

up to 6,000 ft. in record time. Soon they were busily engaged at the lines in ranging some of our siege howitzers on a German battery position.

For about an hour the shoot went on smoothly enough, accompanied by the usual outburst of coughs and bangs as "Barking Benjamin" spat viciously at them whenever they crossed the lines. Three of the guns in our battery had been brought on to the target, and Barnes, who always preferred to send the corrections himself and leave the observer free to watch the sky for enemy aircraft, was patiently striving to get the fourth on as well, when, happening to glance at the rev. counter, he saw that the needle showed a drop of 150 revolutions per minute. He listened intently, but could detect nothing wrong with the steady note of the engine,

and the answering roar when he pushed the throttle lever right over seemed to prove that everything was all right there. And yet when he looked again at the needle it had dropped another hundred degrees. He hastily consulted the other instruments, but the speed had not decreased, and the aneroid still pointed to 6,000 ft. Suddenly, as he watched, the needle gave a convulsive jerk and dropped to 0, but the engine, which in the ordinary course of events ought to have stopped dead, still roared smoothly on. Then, just as he was beginning to think he had gone off his head, the solution flashed across him. The drive of the rev. counter had broken, of course without affecting the engine in the least, but the instrument was now useless.

Barnes heaved a sigh of relief. Like

any other experienced pilot, he could tell by the sound and pulling power approximately what revolutions the engine was giving, and when he knew that the instrument was out of action it did not worry him in the least. As he said afterwards, it was only when the beastly thing was behaving as if it was bewitched that he had felt rather uncomfortable and had begun to wonder what would happen next.

Turning back to the lines, he called up the battery again and continued the interrupted shoot. After another twenty minutes the fourth gun began to shoot a little better, although the bursts were still rather widely scattered, and he gave the signal for battery fire. Half an hour went by, during which the German position became an inferno of smoke and flame as salvo after salvo was poured on it. Four

direct hits were scored, three of them on the same gun pit, and a dump of ammunition about two hundred yards away was blown up, causing a huge cloud of greyish smoke, which hung over the target for some time.

During a pause in the firing the Cherub handed over a slip of paper with a map reference scrawled on it, together with the words, "Look there. I think we have got him this time." Barnes consulted his map and then concentrated his attention on the eastern edge of a small wood some two miles behind the German front line. It looked a very ordinary, straightforward sort of wood. No movement of any kind was visible, nor was there any sign of newly dug trenches or gun pits anywhere in the neighbourhood, and he looked at the map again to see if he had read the refer-

ence correctly. Yes, that was it, the middle of the far edge of the Bois Haricot. What was the Cherub so excited about it for, hadn't he ever seen the wood before? Barnes was on the point of turning away, when suddenly he saw the cause of his companion's excitement. Four tiny pin-points of flame stabbed up from among the trees, one after the other, quickly but quite regularly, and apparently all from the same place. A moment later he heard the cough of an exploding "Archie" shell, followed by three more, one after another, and, glancing round, he saw the four writhing balls of black smoke drifting past his wing tip.

So that was it, was it? They had at last succeeded in locating "Barking Benjamin." Well, they would get a little of their own back now. His fingers began to

beat a rapid succession of dots and dashes on the wireless key by his side, and the message that a German anti-aircraft gun was in action on the eastern side of the Bois Haricot sped down to our gunners as fast as he could send it. That would do the trick ; in a few minutes a hurricane of shells would be pouring down on the blighter, and unless he shifted his pitch quickly, it was even chances that he wouldn't be able to move or fire at all for a long time afterwards.

But "Barking Benjamin" had the last word after all.

Just as Barnes was finishing the message, there was a terrific crash just over his head, and he heard fragments of steel hissing past in all directions. Before he realised that he wasn't hit, there was a second, and the whole machine quivered

and rocked. It was followed by an awful grinding noise and a series of violent jerks, the last being the worst of all, and the engine stopped dead.

A flying piece of steel had smashed two of the cylinders, which had fallen off, and the pistons, being suddenly let loose, had churned up everything inside the crank-case, reducing the engine to a worthless piece of scrap iron.

For a few seconds Barnes felt dazed, and wondered vaguely why everything had suddenly become so quiet, but the explosion of a third shell, this time fortunately not so close, but sounding much louder now that the roar of the engine had ceased, brought him to his senses with a start. He banked sharply away from the swirling patch of smoke, but, forgetting to keep the nose down in order to maintain flying

speed, side-slipped several hundred feet in doing so and nearly got into a spin. By the time the machine was under control again "Archie" had been shaken off for the time being, and he was able to take stock of the position.

On looking over the side he found that they were about two miles over the wrong side of the lines at a height of 5,500 ft., and realised with relief that they could get back to our own side without much difficulty. It would mean a peppering from the machine guns in the Boche trenches, but that wasn't much to worry about, and at any rate it would give the observer a chance of doing some useful shooting at the infantry in those trenches. He glanced towards his colleague's seat with the intention of shouting a few directions, but to his amazement found that where the head

and shoulders of the occupant ought to have been there was nothing to be seen. To all appearances the observer's seat was empty !

For a moment he was dumbfounded, and a wild idea flashed across his mind that the first explosion had blown away the floor and hurled the Cherub to his death 5,000 ft. below. But he soon realised that this was impossible, since the sides and the rest of the fuselage which he could see were undamaged, and he wildly shouted the Cherub's name. There was no reply, and Barnes was beginning to picture him lying in a crumpled heap at the bottom of his cockpit, perhaps bleeding to death, when a white, but still smiling face slowly appeared over the back of the seat.

“ What's the matter ?—you hit ? ” he

shouted, conversation having become possible as the engine was not running.

"Yes, in the leg. A splinter of the engine got me, and I've just been tying up the mess. Can we get back all right?"

"I think so. Must get you back to Blighty now. Is it very bad?"

"I'm all right, don't bother about me, only try not to crash on landing."

By this time they were at 2,500 ft., and rapidly approaching the trenches. The expected crackle of machine-gun fire broke out, and occasionally a hole appeared in the planes, but Barnes dared not try and swerve lest in doing so he should lose height without any corresponding gain in distance. He pushed the nose down ever so slightly and the rush of air increased, the wires began to hum, and the gap of No-man's-land swept towards them. The

soft "phut, phut" made by the bullets flying past became more frequent, and dragging himself into an upright position the Cherub grasped his gun and sent an answering stream spurting into the narrow cracks in the ground below.

They flashed over No-man's-land, over our front line and support lines, and then a sudden series of bangs just beneath them betokened that they were passing over our field-gun positions. Barnes glanced anxiously at the aneroid; the pointer showed 800 ft. He had chosen his landing-place a few moments before, a fairly level piece of ground seemingly less pitted with shell-holes than any other part in the vicinity, between two heavy howitzer batteries, and the question was whether he could reach it. It was the same problem that he had been faced with

earlier in the day, and it seemed for the moment that the previous performance was going to be repeated. But this time his luck held. The wheels touched the ground just in front of a gaping "crump" hole, bumped off again, and touched a second time a good ten yards beyond it on a more or less level stretch. The machine ran on another hundred yards, missing another shell hole by inches, and finally came to a standstill not more than 30 ft. from an old disused trench.

Barnes heaved a sigh of relief and began to unfasten his safety-belt. "A bit better than the last attempt, Cherub. Don't you ever call me a dud pilot again."

There was no answer, and looking up he found that the Cherub, whose leg was worse smashed than he knew, had fainted. But assistance was soon forthcoming. A

crowd of officers and men from the nearest battery were running towards the machine, and a gunner captain, who was one of the first to arrive, at once took charge of the situation. The unconscious observer was carefully lifted from his seat and laid on the ground, a man was sent off at the double to fetch a stretcher, while one of the officers with a knowledge of first aid roughly bandaged the wound with one of the ever-ready field dressings. The stretcher party soon arrived, and the Cherub, who had just come round again, was supplied with a cigarette and carried off to the nearest field dressing-station, followed by a chorus of cheery expressions of good luck.

“Good-bye for the present, old thing; I’ll see you again in a few days when I’m on leave. Mind you let me know what

hospital you get to in Blighty." Barnes waved his hand, and walked away towards the battery accompanied by several of the officers, who plied him with a steady stream of questions as to what had happened.

Having telephoned to his squadron and given a full report of the accident, he was taken to one of the dug-outs and given a good meal, and then he settled down to await for the arrival of the lorry and gang of mechanics who were being sent to dismantle the machine and take it back to the aerodrome. The time passed pleasantly enough at first, yarning with the officers of the battery, who did everything they could for him, but when one of them mentioned quite casually that he had heard that all leave was being stopped sometime during the next day or two, Barnes became very anxious to get back

to the squadron, and when, three hours later, his flight commander arrived with the "breakdown party," the first thing he did was to inquire whether there was any truth in the rumour. Harford smiled, and said he hadn't heard anything about it, and then, having set his men to work on the machine, he sent Barnes back in his tender, remaining himself in charge of the dismantling operations.

But the unfortunate pilot's troubles were not yet over, for half way back to the aerodrome the tender skidded on a particularly bad piece of road and got stuck in the deep ditch bordering it. And there it stayed, until nearly two hours later a passing "caterpillar" hauled it back on to the road again. Dinner had been over some time when he finally got back, and, having made out his report,

Barnes had a scratch meal and went straight to bed, and dreamed of the story he would have to tell when two days later he would be safe at home in the midst of his fair admirers.

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